

# *Vaiṣṇava Compassion*





# *Vaiṣṇava Compassion*

*Śatsvarūpa dāsa Goswami*

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The tenderness of the heart experienced toward Kṛṣṇa is known as *bhakti*. All other *jīvas* are servants of Kṛṣṇa. When one experiences tenderness of heart toward them, it is known as *dayā*, compassion. Therefore, compassion is included within *bhakti*.

—*Jaiva Dharma*, p. 179





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# Foreword

*Vaiṣṇava Compassion* navigates the intricate and, at times, complicated process of expressing true acts of compassion, teaching how emotive prayer as the core attitude residing in the chanting of the holy names of God empowers compassion. “Feeling helpless in the face of others’ suffering helps us feel human.” (p. 141) “Although active [helping] is important, it is in prayer where we can recollect ourselves and touch the nature of universal suffering.” (p. 143)

By revealing his personal, introspective meditations, the author carefully and caringly distinguishes between mundane sentimentality, dogmatic evangelism, and genuine self-actualized love and care—first describing how to care for oneself and then how to extend compassion to others. “Life is not just about absolute ideals but the willingness to live them in the real world. . . . Compassion is what will save our society.” (pp. 141–42)

In a time when care-providing, self-help, psychotherapy, social work, and other common buzz words threaten to obscure the sublime methods and depth of heart that are transmitted by real, spiritual compassion, he sorts out the confusion and ambiguity. This allows readers and care practitioners from all walks of life entrance into the causeless grace and shelter invoked by the empowered teacher, who compassionately grants access to the holy name to all souls.

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami demonstrates by his self-honesty and fearless examination of the pitfalls of material welfare work that those engaging in counseling, hospice work, self-care, and healing through personal discovery can deepen the richness of this essential journey, which often tragically excludes the empowerment of prayer. The challenging yet rewarding experience of helping others becomes eternally meaningful by grasping a genuine understanding of what authentic help means—delivering real and lasting spiritual compassion.

—The Publishers





# *Introduction*

I WAS AWARE OF THE CONCEPT OF COMPASSION before I met Śrīla Prabhupāda. While I was studying at Brooklyn College, I took a philosophy course in which we studied the writings of Bertrand Russell. In particular, I remember how he presented Nietzsche in comparison to Buddha. He gave a synopsis of Buddha's philosophy, compared it to Nietzsche's approach to humankind, and asked in effect, "Which do you think is better?" Russell was obviously taken with Buddha's compassion for living beings, and considered a Buddha superior to a philosopher who worked with humanity as an idea. That was my first introduction to how compassion was meant to be a heartfelt sentiment.

Just before I entered the Navy, I went to confession at a Staten Island church. I told the priest I had begun to doubt the sacrament of confession. When he invited me to meet him at the rectory, I poured out my concerns—the injustice whites were perpetrating against blacks, the senseless Korean War, and the complete materialism of standard American values. The priest said simply, "I see you have a lot of love in you." I was flattered, but I knew what I was really saying: How could a loving God allow so many injustices in the world? I was losing faith. The world seemed coldhearted, competition-based, and loveless. Most of my friends agreed with this analysis. Thinking back, I see now that the priest was acknowledging my sentiment but recognizing that I had no idea how to express my love properly.

Entering the Navy did not help develop such sentiments. Upon discharge, I accepted a job in the Welfare Department. This is usually considered a compassionate field. However, I didn't take the position because I felt any particular sentiment for the poor. Rather, I took it because it was an easy job for a college graduate to get.

Some people working in the Welfare Department actually did care about their clients, but I saw right away that such concern was difficult to maintain. Many of them were simply trying to beat the system. Few of these clients were interested in improving their lives. Many used the money to buy alcohol, drugs, or to engage in activities that degraded them.



I felt my heart grow hard while working with those people. I think what really affected me was that there was no way out for them. The welfare system provided only a subsistence lifestyle, and many of these people were genuinely needy. It was going to take more than a new refrigerator or a few dollars to lift them out of both their poverty and the mentality that prevented them from being able to do more with their lives. I could see that the Welfare Department was bailing a boat with a leaky bucket. My experience is probably common in the professionally compassionate fields. Later, I would hear Prabhupāda quote Vidyāpati in another context: When you are dying of thirst in a desert, what good is one drop of water? I realized early that I could make no real impact on my clients' lives and that material welfare work could not lift them above their suffering.

Later, in 1966, I broke my heels in a fall and was confined to bed for six weeks. I used the time to read books on Eastern philosophy and religion, including the *Upaniṣads* and other Vedic books, and books on Buddhism. I still remember one book in particular called *The Compassionate Buddha*. I read it because I liked the idea of being compassionate. Although selfishness is a natural characteristic of conditioned souls in Kali-yuga, few of us are born without a natural sense of compassion. Still, Śrīla Prabhupāda states that natural compassion is becoming more and more covered in this age:

But in this age—it is called Kali-yuga—we are reducing our bodily strength, our memory, power of memorizing, our feelings of sympathy for others, compassion, age, duration of life, religious propensities. . . . Formerly if somebody is attacked by another man, many persons will come to help him: "Why this man is attacked?" But at the present moment if one man is attacked, the passersby will not care for it because they have lost their sympathy or mercifulness for others. Our neighbor may starve, but we don't care for it. . . . This is Kali-yuga.

—Vyāsa-pūjā address, New Vrindavan, September 2, 1972

Even for those of us who manage to retain our compassionate sentiments into adulthood, we are deluged with images of suffering through the media. Gradually, we become jaded, our sentiments dulled. It is normal to hear that fifty thousand were killed here, twenty thousand there, two million in such-and-such earthquake, ten thousand homeless due to such-and-such flood—again and again and again—and *all* of it is horrible. We are helpless



## Introduction

in the light of so much suffering. Over time, we back away from the world's pain in order to either experience or sidestep the suffering we can find in our own backyards. It just seems too much to try for more.

When I met Śrīla Prabhupāda, I came to understand real compassion. I also came to understand how truly rare a compassionate person is. Compassion is not a material quality but an extension of our spiritual consciousness. The dictionary defines it as "A feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another's suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause." Syn. *commiseration, tenderness, heart, clemency*; Ant. *mercilessness, indifference*.

*Sympathy*: "Harmony of or agreement in feeling, as between persons or on the part of one person with respect to another; a quality of mutual relations between people or things whereby whatever affects one also affects the other; the ability to share the feelings of another, esp. in sorrow or trouble; compassion or commiseration; *sympathies*—feelings or impulses of compassion."

Here is a list of Sanskrit terms that further divide the sentiments of compassion:

*anukampana*—sympathy, compassion

*anugraha*—favor, kindness, conferring benefits upon, promoting the good objective of, gracious toward

*karuṇa*—compassion; the pathetic sentiment in poetry

*kṛpā*—compassion accompanied by tenderness, pity (*kṛpālu*), specifically refers to compassion expressed toward those whom one knows

*dayā*—widespread or generalized feelings of mercy or sympathy. (In the *Bhāgavatam*, Dayā is the daughter of Dakṣa, expertise, and the mother of Abhaya, fearlessness.)

Compassion means we think beyond our own troubles and feel sympathy and heartfelt sorrow for the troubles of others. There are those who are compassionate toward those they know—their friends, relatives, countrymen, or fellow religionists—and those great souls who are compassionate toward all spirit souls. Śrīla Prabhupāda was such a great soul. Prabhupāda's heart bled to see our suffering, and he dedicated his life to helping us overcome it. What makes him rarer still is that not only was he willing to dedicate his life to alleviating our pain, he actually knew the panacea.



And he asked us to repay him by helping those whom *we* met.

But what if we don't share the depth of his compassion? What if we don't feel any compassion at all? We can still enlist in his mission. By working for someone compassionate, we can develop compassion. By serving others, and by serving Prabhupāda's compassionate heart, we can give up selfishness and become big-hearted.

Some devotees may hear this and wonder how this could be true. If Śrīla Prabhupāda began a compassionate movement, and if we have been working for him all these years, why haven't *we* become compassionate? Or, perhaps it can be argued that we have become compassionate, but only toward those who have not yet contacted Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then why hasn't our compassion spilled over in our relationships with other devotees?

I won't pretend to have the single answer to those questions, but I think it is healthy to ask them. There was a time in ISKCON when we presumed we were the most compassionate people in the world; after all, we were distributing the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, the greatest benediction ever to be given to humankind. The scriptures define Kṛṣṇa consciousness as *para-upakāra*, the best welfare work for humanity. It is supposed to be better than the Peace Corps, better than the Cancer Research Society—better than any other idea anyone else has ever had about how to free people from suffering. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is also universal, and there is nothing to bar anyone from participating. It is *sarvatra sarvadā*, suitable to be practiced in all times, all places, and under all circumstances. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

Men do not know that the ultimate goal of life is Viṣṇu, . . . due to being bewildered by the glaring reflection in the darkness, and as such everyone is entering into the darkest region of material existence, driven by the uncontrolled senses. The whole material existence has sprung up because of sense gratification, . . . principally . . . sex desire, and the result is that in spite of all advancement of knowledge, the final goal of all the activities of the living entities is sense gratification. . . . Universal consciousness is factually achieved by coordinated service of all concerned to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and that alone can insure total perfection. Therefore even the great scientists, the great philosophers, the great mental speculators, the great politicians, the great industrialists, the great social reformers, etc., cannot give any relief to the restless society of the material world because they do not



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know the secret of success . . . namely, that one must know the mystery of *bhakti-yoga*. . . . The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* therefore says again and again that without attainment of the status of *bhakti-yoga*, all the activities of human society are to be considered absolute failures only.

—*Bhāg.* 2.9.36, purport

That we have such a great, compassionate gift to offer to others, however, does not mean that we are ourselves the most compassionate of workers. It also does not mean that those who are working in less glorious ways but who are giving more selflessly of themselves are not expressing compassion. In fact, they may be expressing more compassion toward others than we are. There are many grassroots workers in this world who sacrifice their lives for their chosen causes, even though those causes may offer only temporary relief to those whom they are trying to help. What could be motivating them except a sense of compassion? Still, we devotees tend to think we are better simply because we have access to the *para-upakāra*.

Real compassion is not achieved automatically upon joining the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Compassion is not a line of work but an expansion of heart. The more institutionalized we make our acts of compassion, the more likely we are to fall victim to motivations such as pride, honor, righteousness—one type of moral superiority or another. Śrīla Prabhupāda, however, genuinely understood the suffering of material life and the pain of rebirth. He knew and taught his followers that only by awakening the people's dormant Kṛṣṇa consciousness could they be freed from the cycle of birth and death. It is not enough, he said, to alleviate people's material hunger and thirst. It is not enough to alleviate their suffering for this lifetime only. He wanted his followers not only to save the drowning man's coat but the drowning man himself.

# *A Poem*

THE HISTORY OF OUR MOVEMENT—IT'S  
about compassion. One who feels it is mighty,  
a Jimmy Carter or as the poet described  
an Anne Frank, Bodhisattvas,  
authors who choose  
compassion as a subject rather than  
campfires or legal systems  
just because they sell better.

Compassion costs, hurts, takes us  
beyond ourselves, our voices  
become poetic  
because we care.

It's the opposite of selfish and self-  
absorbed, although we say compassion  
begins with showing care for  
ourselves.  
It just doesn't end there.

Compassion isn't *only* giving people  
spiritual knowledge by selling them a book or  
telling them about Kṛṣṇa. I mean,  
that's the end of it, but it includes  
plain old help—food, money,  
*care* for people—and not for the fools  
“out there” but our *own* people too.



It means while delivering meals to a woman  
whose baby lies in the hospital,  
or sharing confidences while someone  
struggles with themselves,  
we apply the greatest balm  
to any person in any condition—  
the balm of devotional service  
to Bhagavān—to reach out  
with that.





# 1

## Preaching as Compassion

My dear Nityānanda, how can the fallen souls be saved?

—*Caitanya-bbāgavata*

# THE HISTORY OF THE

REPUBLIC OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BY



# Compassion for Oneself

IF I AM TO WRITE A BOOK ON COMPASSION, I will have to face two facts: (1) for a Kṛṣṇa conscious devotee, compassion is expressed as preaching; and, (2) I am not a great preacher. Devotees may feel empathy for others, but unless they are willing to extend themselves to give others Kṛṣṇa consciousness in some way, they are not experiencing compassion. I will have to humble myself before the magnitude of the quality of compassion.

When I examine myself, I see that I am not meditating on the pain of others but on my own pain. For example, I tend to be preoccupied with my headache syndrome. I feel I need to start with showing compassion toward myself. Although we usually consider self-care selfish, it isn't always. Since we are each *jīvas*, care for ourselves is a way to face the universal cycle of pain and need, concern and care. Taking care of ourselves is a beginning link to understanding why we should care for others—and *how* we should care for others. It is not full-blown compassion, but it is a crucial first step to awakening that quality in the heart.

Pity is a synonym of compassion. Its definition includes the word "tenderness." When we have pity toward ourselves, however, we have self-pity, which always has negative connotations. After all, we are meant to be strong, tolerant, and, especially, grateful for what we have in light of what others do not. Self-pity connotes self-absorption.

So I am not equating compassion for oneself with self-pity. Rather, by truly feeling our own hurts, we can understand how others may be feeling theirs, and we can feel sorry for the universal condition of pain. As I said, it is a beginning.

As devotees aspiring to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness throughout our entire lives, the ability to be compassionate toward ourselves seems necessary. For example, we actually have to save ourselves first before we can hope to save anyone else. Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke on this point in a room conversation in Māyāpur:



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To save them from being washed away by *māyā*, if we become washed away, then where is the hope? Therefore Caitanya Mahāprabhu said, *janma sārthaka kari' kara para-upakāra*. Be strong so that you may not be rascal, and then you can do; . . . Otherwise, it will be impossible. How it is possible? A man is drowning. If you are strong enough, you can save. But if you also become drowned, then how you'll save him? So everything is there. Save yourself, save others. This is our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. First of all save yourself; then try to save others. Or both things can go on simultaneously. The same example. If you want to save somebody who's drowning you must know that I may not be washed away. I have to remain strong; then I can save him.

—Room Conversation, Māyāpur, February 14, 1977

We save ourselves by following strict *sādhana*, including hearing, chanting, and remembering Kṛṣṇa. Often, this means protecting our *sādhana* from the pressure to do more outreaching services. The willingness to protect our *sādhana* in that way is a form of compassion toward ourselves.

Self-compassion also means taking care of our health. Caring for our health includes facing our physical limitations without guilt or anxiety. Kṛṣṇa loves even ill devotees, and ill devotees can serve Kṛṣṇa in mind if their bodies cannot cooperate.

Self-compassion means being prepared to live in the *āśrama* that is most suitable for us, even if we hear that another *āśrama* is "higher." It means facing our material desires honestly, even if that means abandoning ideals we cannot live up to. Such honest and compassionate self-acceptance can lead us toward accepting others who also do not measure up to our ideals.

Today I was speaking with a friend about a devotee who is still practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness but who seems to be spending her time doing the things she was doing before she joined the movement. My friend gave a short laugh and said, "It seems like we're *all* doing that."

And it's true. For many of us, it has taken years of heartache (and inflicting heartache on others), artificial renunciation, bouts of fanaticism, and hypocrisy before we have been able to accept things about ourselves that were perhaps the best things we had. Of course, giving up those things was usually necessary for us to learn how to take our talents, finally



## *Preaching as Compassion*

recognize their value, and want to use them in Kṛṣṇa's service. We are physically older now, we are no longer fresh and starry-eyed, and those of us who have survived the process have put ourselves—and others—through much in our attempt to surrender. If only we could have made the connection we were seeking sooner and not tried to throw so much of ourselves so recklessly away. If only other devotees had demanded less of us, we might have been spared so much wear and tear. But we couldn't and we weren't. Many of us fanatically trashed everything we were as if it was irrelevant to our lives. All of this was necessary to our growth. Now it seems compassionate to allow ourselves to move beyond it when the time feels right. When we can be that compassionate with ourselves, we will be able to be that compassionate with others.

I am not speaking about lowering our aspirations or our allegiance to our initiation vows; I am speaking about allowing ourselves to find an honest balance between who we are and what we wish to become, and to acknowledge our needs or relax rigidity.

While writing this book, I received a letter from a devotee interested in the topic of showing compassion toward oneself:

This philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the most beautiful philosophy I know, but the application of it can be like a razor's edge. It can make you or break you to pieces. I feel like I've been on the wrong side of the razor for too long, living in the world of the shoulds and should nots, dos and do nots, surrender and do as your authority says and it's your duty, you've made a vow. I don't want to come across that these don't have a place—they do—but we can become so obsessed by them, with rules and regulations, with pointing the finger if they are broken in any way, that we can crush ourselves and those around us, and any little seed of *bhakti* that may be there in our hearts can become crushed because we have lost what is perhaps the singlemost important quality of a devotee, and that is compassion, compassion for those around us and even for ourselves. It is the most beautiful quality and the one capable of killing off the negative side of the razor's edge. It can even turn a helpless, desolate caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly. That is the power of compassion within this philosophy.



Becoming self-compassionate means becoming more human, and certainly more accepting of our own humanity. In devotional service, this is a delicate process and needs to be addressed carefully in each devotee's life. When we allow ourselves to become more human and honest, we have to be careful not to create new philosophies. There is a difference between being self-compassionate and propagating philosophies our spiritual master did not teach.

Why more human? Because without learning forgiveness or sympathy—synonyms and corollaries of compassion—and especially if we replace human development and emotion with a too-rigid application of rules and regulations, our *bhakti* will be lost—or worse, never found. As we allow ourselves to become more human, we will naturally become more humble. Humility will allow us to stay under the guru's shelter.

But while remaining in the guru's shelter as we grow in devotional service, we can broaden our understanding of what it means to be a devotee and to preach. Compassion does not mean compromising the ideal. A narrow-minded person will see things in only one way. He will think that preaching means *only* distributing books, that being a devotee can be measured against a stereotype gleaned from a book, and that he cannot use most of what he sees or is in this world. The more of ourselves and our interests we learn to dovetail, however, the broader our minds will become. Compassion toward ourselves and others is based on an inclusive mentality rather than an exclusive one. Yes, I can be saved, and this person too, and this one, and that one—the black, the white, the men, the women, the book distributor, the mother, the *pūjārī*, that one with the job, and even the devotee suffering from chronic illness. Kṛṣṇa's favor is not won by any one particular thing but by sincerity of purpose in what we do. In his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.8.20, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The Lord is so kind that He does not show special favor only to one who is a great philosopher. He knows the sincerity of purpose." And in a lecture on March 13, 1974: "You must find out always some opportunity how to give, render service to Kṛṣṇa. That is the qualification. It doesn't matter what you are. You may be this or that. It doesn't matter. But this eagerness for service can be acquired by anyone simply by sincerity." All are welcome among Kṛṣṇa's servants if they have the desire to be there.



## *Preaching as Compassion*

Since this book is intended as an exposition on compassion, I would like to tell a story about something I experienced today and how it helped me understand both how devotees need to be compassionate toward themselves and how we tend not to be. Prabhupāda told us that we should be strict with ourselves and lenient with everyone else, and most devotees seem to have taken that to heart. This morning my alarm woke me at four minutes after 1:00, but I craved rest. I often feel drowsy during the day due to the various medications I take for headaches, and resting more in the morning helps alleviate that. Still, I love to get up at 1:00 A.M., because those early hours are so productive. I forced myself to get up.

I realized that connected to this forcing of myself was a general feeling that I am living an easy life, that I am not undergoing the same austerities that others face. I also realized that I am becoming more fixed in my conviction that I am living in the only way that makes sense for me, and especially, more fixed and convinced that I like my life. But it has been a long, slow road coming to accept that I have limitations placed on me by health and temperament. Accepting myself means showing myself compassion. It occurred to me, however, that the very last person to whom we extend compassion is ourselves. I know I am quick to show compassion toward other devotees whenever I hear what they are going through. I see their needs, and I also see the guilt they feel, the unfair standards they apply toward themselves, how they are crippled by the judgment of their peers, and how they are usually sincere. I may feel an occasional twinge: “Well, is So-and-so doing the best thing? Is this all he or she can do?” Maybe they are not always up to standard, but still I sympathize—as much with their weakness as with their strength. Yet we are slow to extend such encouragement to ourselves.

In this case, I forced myself to get up early, and while doing so thought of how Śrīla Prabhupāda pushed *himself*. Our spiritual master, Śrīla Prabhupāda, pushed himself in so many ways. Pushing ourselves is an easy way for us to satisfy him, we think. We seem to lack so much in other areas, but this is the one thing we can do—we can sacrifice for our service.

Sacrifice is good, but like anything, we need to learn how to balance it with self-compassion. At the very least, we shouldn’t be insane about our sacrifice. For example, we shouldn’t sacrifice *sādhana* for work. Neither should we sacrifice our health, nor our self-respect.

## *Vaiṣṇava Compassion*

Often we say we are sacrificing *sādhana* in order to work more fully for the mission when actually we have other reasons. Our inability to chant sixteen rounds and follow the four rules is usually not because we have too much work. Rather, we may think, perhaps rightly, that the work is the only decent thing we can offer. We may not have enough faith in hearing and chanting. Part of being compassionate toward ourselves, therefore, is examining our priorities against the priorities our spiritual master has set for us, and finding a healthy balance.



# Reaching Out

**M**OST OF US DID NOT COME TO THE Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement because we wanted to help others. We came because we wanted to help ourselves. Still, here we are, and Kṛṣṇa consciousness *does* provide the answer to what we can do to really help people—we can preach.

The desire and willingness to preach is a blessing, because the enthusiasm to preach comes from Kṛṣṇa and from association with Kṛṣṇa's compassionate devotees. It does not come simply by being a member of a compassionate institution. We ourselves must develop actual compassion—the ability to feel others' suffering accompanied by the desire to do something about it.

For the members of ISKCON, it is crucial that we are convinced of our own path and that we understand how others can be benefited by sharing it. Nowadays, so many devotees have lost their faith in the pure preaching machinery of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. They may have retained their faith in the philosophy but become disappointed in the movement's direction, which seemed more based on finding name and fame than on compassionate outreach. Some devotees have also lost their faith that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the panacea. But just to remember the taste of conviction we have or once had that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is what people really need, and the drive we felt to give it out in some way or other!

I think what devotees have discovered is that it does not always seem enough to hand out a book full of perfect knowledge or to open a temple. We want there to be a quality to our compassionate activity; we want to be consciously trying to help others. Śrīla Prabhupāda had that quality to his preaching. Sometimes he would speak about abortion or the suffering of cows, and a tear would appear in his eye. Often those who witnessed such moments were surprised that someone could actually feel emotion about situations we take for granted. We ourselves are often so limited in our ability to feel others' suffering.



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Therefore, our outreach can begin in a smaller circle. We can start with ourselves and work from there. When we begin to express compassion in a smaller circle, it becomes easier to develop the qualities that support compassion—courtesy, friendliness, and kindness—all of which are also listed among the qualities of a devotee. In ISKCON we have seen that claiming a wider feeling of compassion than we actually possessed only caused us to become arrogant. That smaller circle might include showing compassion toward family members, for example.

But didn't Śrīla Prabhupāda consider such compassion limited, even material? When Arjuna expresses his natural compassion for his family members while standing on the battlefield, Śrīla Prabhupāda comments:

Arjuna's deep affection for community and family members is exhibited here partly due to his natural compassion for them. He is therefore not prepared to fight. Everyone wants to show his opulence to friends and relatives, but Arjuna fears that all his relatives and friends will be killed on the battlefield and he will be unable to share his opulence after victory. This is a typical calculation of material life. The transcendental life, however, is different.

—Bg. 1.32–35, purport

It is important, therefore, that we remember that the essence of compassion is to give others Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Caring for others does not mean engaging in sense gratification with them; our natural compassion can easily be diverted into hypocrisy if we associate with ignorance. Compassion is not a superficial quality, and as Prabhupāda taught us, is not based on bodily identification but on recognition of ourselves as spirit souls and the desire to help other spirit souls.

Although there are many compassionate workers in this world, the quality of what they are offering should be judged by how much it relieves one of material life. Śrīla Prabhupāda was so strong on this point that he gave almost no credit to those who were engaged in less vital forms of compassion. If someone provides a lost and starving boy a meal and a bed but doesn't help him find his home, then his expression of compassion is limited. Similarly, we may offer to help others in so many ways in this world, but if we fail to see the real need—the soul's need to reunite with God—then our kindness is of little value.



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But possessing the knowledge that can free others from their suffering does not necessarily give us the strength of purpose to save them. Our knowledge may only be theoretical, in which case, we are not likely to even be trying to save ourselves. Knowledge, as Śrīla Prabhupāda said, should be both theoretical and practical: "Spiritual knowledge must be developed by a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge, and that is the guaranteed way for attainment of spiritual perfection." (*Bhāg.* 2.3.22, purport) And: "Without practical life in God consciousness, it remains simply theoretical. That [theory] may help, but it takes longer. My students are being trained up in practical spiritual life . . ." (*Journey of Self-Discovery*, 1.3)

Basic Kṛṣṇa conscious knowledge is this: the soul is the eternal servant of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. By awakening one's forgotten relationship with Kṛṣṇa through *bhakti*, the soul can become free from the cycle of birth and death and rejoin Kṛṣṇa in the spiritual world.

These are statements of universal truth; if anyone attempts to follow what they imply, they will receive immense benefit. If we wish to realize this knowledge, we can pray to Kṛṣṇa. We can also pray to become more compassionate. When Kṛṣṇa sees us trying to develop something that will bring us closer to Him, He will give it to us. As we try to increase our compassion, Kṛṣṇa will strengthen us even as we reach out to others. We are fortunate to be in this movement where Śrīla Prabhupāda has arranged for us to engage in the highest welfare work. As we serve him by Kṛṣṇa conscious outreach, striving to see others as spirit souls in need of discovering their lost relationship with Kṛṣṇa, so we will be blessed with increased realization and preaching capacity.

Be kind, be courteous, be friendly; those are the good qualities that will allow others to hear the message. Preaching is not so difficult. Śrīla Prabhupāda says that even a child can preach:

Even a small child in our association, Śyāmasundara's daughter, she would go to somebody, she was only five years old. She would ask, "Do you know Kṛṣṇa?" So somebody said, "No, I do not know." "Oh, Supreme Personality of Godhead." She would preach like that. So they are convinced, *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam*. This conviction is the foremost quality. Then other things will follow. *Sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ*

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*syur etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ*. So if one is simply convinced on this point . . . and he . . . follows the principle, *kṛṣṇaika-saraṇam*. *Varṇāśrama-dharma*. *Kṛṣṇaika-saraṇam*. . . . *Mām ekaṁ saraṇam vraja*. . . . Stick to this principle, that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Kṛṣṇa is *para-tattva*, the Absolute Truth, and Kṛṣṇa is all-pervading. . . . Kṛṣṇa is everywhere. . . . Kṛṣṇa's potency is everywhere. Therefore those who are advanced devotees, they do not see anything else than Kṛṣṇa. Everywhere he sees Kṛṣṇa. And that is a fact.

—Lecture, Vṛndāvana, October 8, 1976



# Save the Drowning Man, But Don't Forget His Coat

THE WORD *COMPASSION*, WHEN CONSIDERED in its Kṛṣṇa conscious context, has heavy connotations. We know it ultimately means the understanding that people are suffering on the spiritual level and our willingness to do something about that. Sometimes we become so absorbed in those connotations, however, that we lose track of the importance of expressing compassion in very human ways, ways that we may even consider mundane. A little humility and good nature at a ticket counter can often be a more effective way to both present Kṛṣṇa consciousness and to feel it ourselves than many of our other attempts. We know the nondevotees are suffering due to lack of spiritual understanding; actually, we often know that we are suffering from the same disease, although perhaps to a lesser degree. It seems prudent to be kind. Imagine what it's like for these people who are forced to do the same monotonous jobs each day, and how easy it would be, in our exchanges with them, to lighten their load.

We have many opportunities to practice basic kindness toward others, both nondevotees and devotees. We meet people almost everywhere, and by simply being kind, we can not only uplift their spirits but our own. We say that Kṛṣṇa is in our hearts, but He is also present in the hearts of other devotees and the nondevotees. Actually, He is present in the heart of every living entity. The scriptures assure us that there are many kinds of *aparādha*, and among them is what is known as *jana-aparādha*, offending the ordinary people. A devotee does not engage in it.

And the fact is, many people are curious about Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If a devotee represents himself as kind, a little more free of ego than the average person, people automatically become attracted to that. They may wonder, "What *is* it that this person possesses that allows him or her to be so nice?" Such persons may be willing to hear a little about spiritual life.

Devotees often think that we are obliged to give the straight Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy to everyone we meet, but this is not the example



that Śrīla Prabhupāda set. If someone did not seem inclined, Prabhupāda would usually not disturb him. There is a story that illustrates this:

One morning, while Jayānanda was walking with Prabhupāda, they approached a man who had just pulled a fish out of the water. The fisherman held up his catch, dangling it as if offering it to Prabhupāda. "Anyone for a fish dinner?" the man asked cheerily. Prabhupāda smiled, "No, you enjoy." Prabhupāda kept walking until he was past the man and then added, "And suffer."

—*Prabhupāda-līlā*, p. 123

Prabhupāda taught us that a devotee should set an example of "working in devotion" and offering the results to Kṛṣṇa. Those who are inclined toward spiritual life will warm to this example and inquire themselves. Those who are not, will not be disturbed. As Kṛṣṇa states in *Bhagavad-gītā*, "So as not to disrupt the minds of ignorant men attached to the fruitive results of prescribed duties, a learned person should not induce them to stop work. Rather, by working in the spirit of devotion, he should engage them in all sorts of activities [for the gradual development of Kṛṣṇa consciousness]." (Bg. 3.26)

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda states:

... a realized soul in Kṛṣṇa consciousness should not disturb others in their activities or understanding, but he should act by showing how the results of all work can be dedicated to the service of Kṛṣṇa. The learned Kṛṣṇa conscious person may act in such a way that the ignorant person working for sense gratification may learn how to act and how to behave.

Living in this world requires humility. We may not be greatly compassionate souls, but we can always remember that we are following the greatest compassionate preacher, Śrīla Prabhupāda, and that remembrance should help us sweep aside our nasty edges when we deal with others.

Becoming humble in our dealings means giving up our envy. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that when people hear of another's success, they generally speak niceties but think, "Damn it! Why did he get ahead?" Similarly, when people hear of someone's misfortune, they feel an inward gladness.



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In a letter of November 18, 1970, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells the story of one such envious man:

My Guru Maharaja once told this story: one friend informed another that one man has become the high court judge. "Oh no," he replied, "No. That cannot be right." "Yes, he is now a judge," said the first friend. "I have seen him sitting on the bench." The second man replied, "Maybe. But I don't think he is getting any salary." Such envious men will find out some fault anywhere. There is no fault, actually, but they will manufacture some fault. That is their business.

As Cāṇakya Paṇḍita said, you can charm a snake, but not an envious man.

To show how important kindness is when dealing with the public, I would like to tell a story of something that happened to me. One time, I was getting off a plane after a long flight. I was in the back, but I was walking fast, trying to get ahead of the people in front of us so I wouldn't have to stand in a long line at customs. To get ahead of them, I had to push my way through the crowd and push myself forward at their expense. Then a woman turned to me and said, in a sarcastic tone, "Is it against your religion to be polite?" I felt terrible when she said that, and I also became conscious that when we are dressed as devotees and behaving badly, people seem to link our behavior with our religion. As religionists, we should have seen that other people were also suffering from the long flight and the long disembarkation lines. St. Francis kissed lepers. We are asked only to be kind and considerate in our dealings.



# *A Compassionate Worker Must Have Knowledge*

**L**ORD VIṢṆU TOLD KARDAMA MUNI, “Showing compassion to all living entities, you will attain self-realization. Giving assurance of safety to all, you will perceive your own self as well as all the universes in Me, and Myself in you.” (*Bhāg.* 3.21.31) Śrīla Prabhupāda comments:

The simple process of self-realization for every living entity is described here. The first principle to be understood is that this world is a product of the supreme will. . . . This means that everything should be considered a product of the Lord’s energy, and therefore everything should be employed in the service of the Lord. One’s energy should be utilized for one’s self-interest. That is the perfection of the energy.

This energy can be utilized for real self-interest if one is compassionate. A person in Kṛṣṇa consciousness . . . is always compassionate. He is not satisfied that only he himself is a devotee, but he tries to distribute the knowledge of devotional service to everyone. There are many devotees of the Lord who faced many risks in distributing the devotional service of the Lord to people in general. That should be done. . . . As long as one is not compassionate to people in general in his devotional service to the Lord, he is a third-class devotee. The first-class devotee gives assurance to every living being that there is no fear of this material existence: “Let us live in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and conquer the nescience of material existence.”

—*Bhāg.* 3.21.31, purport

I don’t think any devotee in ISKCON can say that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not consider preaching a prime duty for his disciples. This preaching mood was particularly strong in Śrīla Prabhupāda, even though many of his Godbrothers were more interested in *bhajāna*. The duty to go out and preach has shaped this institution, and it has shaped his followers. Our sense of success and failure revolves around our success at performing this duty; we have come to identify ourselves as preachers.

Before we can experience spiritual compassion for others, however, we need to learn how to experience the world through the eyes of *śāstra*. By



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definition, compassion is evoked by perceiving another's suffering. If we fail to understand the suffering inherent in a life of sense gratification, we will not be able to feel compassion for those who live for the senses. We may even be tempted to live that way ourselves. We need a clear Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophical understanding before we can know how to apply our compassion. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

Compassion for the eternal soul is self-realization. . . . No one knows where compassion should be applied. Compassion for the dress of a drowning man is senseless. A man fallen in the ocean of nescience cannot be saved simply by rescuing his outward dress—the gross material body. One who does not know this and laments for the outward dress is called a *śūdra*, or one who laments unnecessarily. . . . Lord Kṛṣṇa, however, can dissipate the lamentation of the ignorant man, and for this purpose the *Bhagavad-gītā* was sung by Him.

—Bg. 2.1, purport

Śrīla Prabhupāda also tells us that softheartedness is the “characteristic of a devotee.” Still, that softheartedness must be properly directed.

The beginning of knowledge is sense control. In Bg. 13.8–12, Kṛṣṇa describes the items of knowledge:

Humility; pridelessness; nonviolence; tolerance; simplicity; approaching a bona fide spiritual master; cleanliness; steadiness; self-control; renunciation of the objects of sense gratification; absence of false ego; the perception of the evil of birth, death, old age and disease; detachment; freedom from entanglement with children, wife, home and the rest; even-mindedness amid pleasant and unpleasant events; constant and unalloyed devotion to Me; aspiring to live in a solitary place; detachment from the general mass of people; accepting the importance of self-realization; and philosophical search for the Absolute Truth—all these I declare to be knowledge, and besides this whatever there may be is ignorance.

Knowledge also includes understanding our relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead—and the fact that every living entity has such a relationship. Without that vision, our compassion will be misplaced, focused only on the body or senses of others and not on the root cause of their suffering.



## Compassion is Giving Knowledge

**P**REACHING MEANS TO GIVE OTHERS KṚṢṆA. *How* we give others KṚṣṇa is not stereotyped. There are many ways to preach, and devotees should be broadminded enough—and creative enough—to recognize that. For example, there is this verse in the First Canto:

Let me offer my respectful obeisances unto him [Śuka], the spiritual master of all sages, the son of Vyāsadeva, who, out of his great compassion for those gross materialists who struggle to cross over the darkest regions of material existence, spoke this most confidential supplement to the cream of Vedic knowledge, after having personally assimilated it by experience.

—*Bhāg.* 1.2.3

This indicates that compassion can be expressed both by creating literature and speaking philosophy. When Śukadeva spoke to the sages on the bank of the Ganges, his words were preserved in writing so that others who were not present could benefit. Thus he was compassionate—toward the king and toward the attending sages—and Śrīla Vyāsadeva was compassionate enough to record his words.

In ISKCON, devotees have developed many ways to distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Some distribute books, some distribute *prasādam*, some produce the literature that is being distributed, some speak in public lectures. Śrīla Prabhupāda expressed this point in a 1971 lecture, in Gorakhpur, India:

... if there is no preaching, there is no botheration. You can sit down and show people, “I have now become a very liberated soul,” and chant and meditate. That means sleeping. This sort of business is condemned by my Guru Mahārāja. ... He wanted to see that everyone is engaged in preaching work, some sort of preaching work, either indoor or outdoor. When you are indoors you have to be busy writing articles for a magazine and proofread and so many things indoors. And outdoors you have to go door to door, make them members, make them interested in



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this movement, collect money for expenses, outdoor. Preaching, you have to meet opposing elements. . . . This is missionary work, not that “Whenever I find some opportunity, go to some solitary place and sleep.” This is not missionary life. So we should adjust things. Not that, “All right, it is going on. That’s all.” You have got very responsible business, this Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It is genuine, it is authorized, and Lord Caitanya wants us to do it all over the world. The things should be adjusted and keep us always alive to our self-responsibility.

Our preaching is not just mundane welfare work. We want people to awaken their dormant love of God. Śrīla Prabhupāda once spoke to some priests in Detroit. They were criticizing him because he did not have a program to help the handicapped or the drug addicts or other misfortunates. They accused him of stressing education over social reform. That was true: Śrīla Prabhupāda thought that the people needed education in order to understand that they were not the body. He knew they could not become happy without this understanding. His compassion was not patchwork. He wanted people to gain the highest understanding from his movement.

The priests, however, considered such education secondary to the relief work they were doing. I think this is an interesting point, because it shows that Śrīla Prabhupāda had a broad vision when he thought of preaching. His disciples have done direct physical relief work, but the main thrust of our movement is education. In this verse about Śukadeva Gosvāmī’s compassion there is the phrase, “struggle to cross over the darkest regions of material existence.” People are entangled in the material world. In *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa depicts the material world as a banyan tree. A banyan is a deeply rooted tree, with its branches hanging down touching the earth and rooting themselves in the soil. This characteristic makes it impossible to trace the tree’s original roots. Similarly, it is very difficult to trace out the root cause of our entanglement in matter. Kṛṣṇa’s remedy is that we cut at all the roots with the weapon of knowledge. That requires education.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was quite strong on this point. He often made forceful, even denigrating, statements about unproductive charity work. He was not an altruist in the material sense; he never compromised his spiritual vision in the face of material suffering. That was his compassion—to face the truth that rescuing a coat was not the same as rescuing the man.



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Śrīla Prabhupāda's particular contribution was to take the Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy and make it relevant to and approachable by people who were not particularly philosophical. Like Śukadeva, he had "personally assimilated" the teachings "by experience." To have personally assimilated the teachings means he must have practiced them himself. If we wish to be compassionate toward others, we have to start by being compassionate toward ourselves—taking our own spiritual practices seriously. It is not possible to personally assimilate something we do not practice.

Whatever we do assimilate we can immediately share. Part of our compassion is to deliver the undiluted message of Kṛṣṇa, and the other part is to deliver it in such a way that the people are able to take it. On some level, we have to relate to the people to whom we are preaching.



# *There is No Stand-in for Personal Realization*

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BECOMING COMPASSIONATE IS SIMILAR TO becoming a devotee. We are told that if we want to go back to Godhead, we should serve those who are going back to Godhead. Similarly, if we want to become compassionate, we should serve those who are compassionate.

However, service to the pure devotee does not create our Kṛṣṇa consciousness exactly. That is, we must be voluntary participants in the transformation. By serving and hearing from an advanced devotee, we are meant to *want* to become devotees ourselves. Similarly, although we say we can become compassionate by serving a compassionate devotee, unless we build our own knowledge and faith, we will not be able to maintain the compassionate feeling.

Sören Kierkegaard gives an appropriate example here. In *Purity of Heart is To Will One Thing*, he presents a metaphor. Imagine a palace with a single gate. This palace is God's kingdom, and the only way in is through that gate. Outside, a crowd of people are trying to enter. Perhaps they consider themselves members of a general movement; when the door opens, they can enter en masse. But no, Kierkegaard says, God is more intelligent than that. He only allows people to enter one at a time, each on his or her own merit. There is no stand-in for personal realization and surrender.

Therefore, while discussing compassion as both a quality and a goal, it is important for us to examine where we have been as an institution and as individuals. Looking at our lives and experiences in retrospect will help us to better understand how to move forward.

In the course of delivering the Absolute Truth, that highest compassionate gift, we members of ISKCON have often been uncompassionate. Sometimes we have been too demanding of the recipients of our gift, sometimes we have tried to manipulate their sentiments, and sometimes we have simply not been sensitive enough to see the details of their particular needs. We have also tended to consider that anything a nondevotee does is



useless—unless, of course, the compassionate service was directed toward an ISKCON devotee (then it becomes *ajñāta-sukṛti*).

Among ourselves, we have often rubber-stamped certain forms of preaching as “approved compassion” while denigrating the preaching potency of others. Although I said that if we want to develop compassion for others we should work for Prabhupāda’s compassionate mission, many of us discovered that working for the mission without the inner awareness of what we were doing was neither satisfying nor effective.

We may then ask ourselves, “Am I a preacher? Why am I preaching? How convinced am I?” These are not questions that can be answered once and for all. They are questions we must ask ourselves regularly, ones with which we must live. Answering these questions over time will help us to gather more inner realization as to how we, as Prabhupāda’s followers, are fulfilling his order to preach. An important part of answering these questions is to also ask ourselves whether it is enough for us simply to work for a compassionate person or movement. We are seeking personal realization. Such personal realization is vital to our success as preachers. That is why we should ask *ourselves* why we are preaching and not just immediately repeat what the great teacher says. Are we preaching because we have been ordered to do so by our spiritual master, or do we believe that we are performing the highest welfare work?

“Why are you preaching, Prabhu?”

“Well, Śrīla Prabhupāda convinced me that I should.”

“But did he *really* convince you? Do you *really* believe in Kṛṣṇa as the highest expression of the Godhead?”

“Sure.”

“Why?”

“Because He’s Bhagavān. He has wonderful qualities.”

We can pursue such a dialogue with ourselves to discover our pockets of resistance and to bolster our faith. If we choose instead to live with unexamined faith, we will become complacent. It may be that our willingness to preach is simply based on Prabhupāda’s edict rather than on a personal conviction that we have something important to offer others. It may be that we have been convinced by Prabhupāda’s presentation of the philosophy; we may never have heard anything like it before. It satisfies our intellect. We don’t mind sharing it. It is good to recognize the real



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reason for our interest in preaching, even if we feel embarrassed by its lack of profundity, and then work from there.

Along with these questions, we should ask ourselves, "What is a preacher?" In the simplest analysis, a preacher is someone who helps others come closer to Kṛṣṇa. One of the characteristics of a *mahā-bhāgavata*, for example, is that when people see him, they become attracted to Kṛṣṇa. A preacher should make others feel close to Kṛṣṇa.

There are many ways in which that can be accomplished, but the point is that a preacher gives Kṛṣṇa. That could include someone who has the profile of an actively preaching *sādbu*, or someone who is so modest they barely speak at all. Someone can be a *pūjāri* who shares Kṛṣṇa consciousness by beautifully decorating the Deity. Someone else can be running a restaurant where those who would normally never attend a Kṛṣṇa conscious function can take *prasādam* and taste a devotional atmosphere for the duration of their meal. Someone else can be living in a farm community, practicing what Śrīla Prabhupāda taught and demonstrating those teachings to visitors. There are as many kinds of preachers as there are people in this movement. There are conservative preachers and their followers, and liberal preachers and their followers, and without both of these types of preachers, our movement would not have been able to grow as rapidly as it did.

Developing inner awareness of the compassionate motive behind preaching happens over time and with experience. When we first come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we have many things to learn, not only about the philosophy but about ourselves. If we are fortunate enough to be guided by compassionate preachers, we will be engaged in the compassionate work that will lead us further toward developing our own sense of compassion. Many devotees in this movement have been led forward by enthusiastic preachers who convince us, for example, that going out on *harināma* will be good for us and good for others. Such devotees instill in others the faith that the holy name is the panacea for their suffering. That lesson seems to be particularly effective when the enthusiastic preacher cares not only for the nondevotees on the street but for the devotees on the *harināma* party.

I remember the *harināmas* organized in La Jolla, California by such an enthusiastic preacher. La Jolla is a stylish place, and people go there on Saturday nights for the night life. The streets are lined with fancy restaurants and outdoor cafes, and people ride in the Western version of rickshaws.



Then the *harināma* party strolls down the street. A faithful preacher will be thinking, “These people will see us and hear the *kirtana*. The holy name will bless them.” Those without that conviction will wonder what they are doing out there, will be conscious of how strange the devotees must look in that atmosphere, and will want to go home. Such devotees will not maintain their ability to go out on *harināma* unless they develop more faith and inward awareness of what they are doing. It is not enough to follow an enthusiastic leader.

There are different layers of faith in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and we have to penetrate the obstacles blocking us from attaining them. For example, in *Mādburya-kādamini*, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura describes a neophyte’s faith as *utsāha-mayī*, literally, “false enthusiasm,” more of an enthusiastic self-righteousness than a deep faith. Self-righteousness and compassion rarely go together.

As a devotee gains experience in devotional practices, he usually sheds some of that false enthusiasm and finds himself becoming more sensitive toward others. His self-righteousness moves closer to compassion, and he begins to desire to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others, because he understands just how much it will benefit them. At the same time, however, such devotees also begin to feel more sensitive toward the potential objects of their preaching. That is, they begin to see them as people with a right to follow their chosen religion or creed. It can be difficult for such devotees to preach, because they have to bypass their feeling that they are forcing Kṛṣṇa consciousness upon others when those others have not come forward to ask for it.

Perhaps many devotees would consider such sensitivity a form of mundane compassion. After all, aren’t the nondevotees like the man flying a kite from the roof of a tall building who is about to step off the edge? Are we so sensitive to his feelings that we won’t try to save him from a devastating fall?

Personally, I have always had a lot of difficulty with feeling sensitive toward others’ rights. I remember in 1967, there was a park—not really a park, but a hill and a lawn and a few trees—near our Allston temple. I used to go there on occasion to get a break from all the pressure I was under at work and at the temple. It was one of the few places I could go to be alone. I called it Paramātmā Park, because I felt I was able to consult both my



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inner self and Kṛṣṇa there, and I would often feel both refreshed and directed after a visit.

One afternoon, while leaving the park to go back to the temple, I saw a man sitting on the hill. It appeared that he had come to the park for the same reason I had. I remember thinking about our preaching mission, which at that time was defined as telling everyone we met about Kṛṣṇa, with an emphasis on helping them to understand that Kṛṣṇa consciousness was superior to whatever they were doing. Such preaching would include an invitation to the temple and often, a request for a donation. And there was this man. I thought, “Okay, go get him.” But I didn’t. I was reluctant to disturb him. I wondered why I should invade his privacy when he had not invaded mine. Of course, I could have argued that I was enjoying my privacy as a disciple of Prabhupāda, he was meditating on *māyā*. As I continued on my way without speaking to this man, I felt guilty and a sense of failure. I don’t know, however, that I would not make the same decision again if faced with the same situation.

That is my personal feeling, but the Kṛṣṇa consciousness philosophy does acknowledge that most people misuse their privacy. Prabhupāda did encourage us to get the word out. Perhaps we have to be more creative in our approach than we were in those days and learn to distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness without breaking down people’s doors or becoming intrusive or annoying. It is possible to overdo sensitivity toward other people’s privacy. There are organizations that feel a person’s privacy is his most cherished commodity. They want people to be free to engage in anything they like, regardless of whether or not it is self-destructive. We would not agree with that; a Vedic government would have the power to restrict activities that destroy the morality of the citizenry.

If we have an actual conviction in both the importance of preaching and the power of the holy name, we will be inspired to make Kṛṣṇa consciousness available in ways that are irresistible, or at least attractive. We do believe that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is superior to anything else that’s going on in this world, but let us attract people to this understanding with our deep conviction rather than our pushiness.

It may also be said that a devotee’s dislike for aggressive or dishonest preaching techniques is itself a form of compassion. I agree. Therefore, sensitivity should be honored. Śrīla Prabhupāda himself honored it.



When devotees objected to the scamming techniques we used in book distribution, Śrīla Prabhupāda told them to find another way to distribute his books. Those devotees were often relieved to receive that permission. Some of those devotees may have sold fewer books, but they did it with their sense of personal integrity intact, which seems important too.

I would like to take a moment and speak about my own service, because I think it's relevant to this discussion. I am both shy and suffer from a chronic illness that limits my attendance on the front lines of preaching. Facing these realities, I have tried to use my energy to preach in a way that is possible for me. I write self-expression in a way that simultaneously allows me to be introspective in my own Kṛṣṇa consciousness and which encourages others to examine their own spiritual lives. Although I use my writing as part of my *bhajana*, I remain aware that I am producing a book. Books are culture; they affect the people who read them. I write primarily for devotees, because I have also realized that this is the audience to whom I wish to preach. Not all of us have to approach the nondevotees, but as Prabhupāda said, some of us can help to "boil the milk." Prabhupāda wanted the devotees who joined the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement to develop spiritual quality. In a letter of May 9, 1972, he wrote:

Now I want that we shall concentrate on making our devotees Krishna conscious and ourselves becoming Krishna conscious, and not be so much concerned with expanding ourselves widely but without any spiritual content. Just like boiling the milk, it becomes thicker and sweeter. Now do like that, boil the milk.

By discussing a devotee's life—and not just a perfect devotee but a devotee of Prabhupāda who is striving to follow his teachings—others may be inspired in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If I write from the heart, I'll be able to preach in a way that reaches other people's hearts. I won't be presenting a logical, step-by-step argument about why Kṛṣṇa consciousness is better than any other system, but giving a real taste of a real aspiring devotee's life. I'll also be able to please my spiritual master by helping others become honest enough to face all the difficulties we have to face in this movement and in ourselves.



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I tend to think I don't preach enough, but when I receive a letter in the mail confirming that I have helped someone, I know Śrīla Prabhupāda is pleased. I don't attend festivals, don't go out on the streets to distribute books, don't go out on *harināma*, don't travel with rock bands or *kīrtana* bands or teach at the VIHE, but I can still please Śrīla Prabhupāda with my preaching. Similarly, as ISKCON develops, devotees can find the balance between their integrity and their desire to serve the preaching mission and tell others about Kṛṣṇa. No one should feel discouraged that his or her contribution is unworthy.

# Preaching and Postmodernism

THIS IS THE POSTMODERN AGE, AND PEOPLE HAVE changed from how they were thirty years ago when the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement first reached American shores. Most people now accept almost anything as possibly true; very few ideas have more value than any others. The postmodern age is an age of pluralism. People now have more choices in almost any area than they would have once thought possible. They can choose their style of health care, their style of education, and their style of spirituality. No one type is particularly better than any another. The emphasis is not on absolute truth but on the relative truth of what an individual decides is best for him.

ISKCON can benefit from this more open mood, but it does certainly require a different form of preaching than it did in the 1960s. Preaching nowadays requires more sensitivity, and perhaps new tactics than our old method of leaping into people's paths and tricking them out of their money or into taking a book they don't really want. No longer can we play the role of the red-necked Hare Kṛṣṇa preacher who leaps into people's paths at airports; we must find a new preaching identity.

We used to laugh at the Jehovah's Witnesses, who stand on street corners with their pamphlets, letting anyone interested come forward to take them rather than approaching anyone. We certainly collected much more money than the Jehovah's Witnesses did, and we sold more books, but the public considered us a nuisance.

Being sensitive toward the rights of others needs to be balanced not only on the side of willingness to hit the front lines but with our own natures. Some people are naturally shyer than others. I don't think we can hold willingness to be on the front line as the only test of a devotee's faith. We may have done that in the past. Rather, we can encourage all devotees to seek out their personal desire to preach and to participate in the myriad of ways available.

What makes our preaching efforts valid even when we are not on the front lines of book distribution is when we develop the heart of a preacher.



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We may easily exonerate ourselves that we are not out on the streets if we are doing some bona fide work that supports the preaching mission. For example, *pūjārīs* may beautifully decorate the Deity with the idea that others will see their efforts and become inspired. But without the consciousness of a preacher, simply supporting the preaching mission may not be enough. A *pūjārī* who loves to worship the Deity and does it beautifully but who does not think of his or her service as outreach is not necessarily a preacher. Others *may* become inspired by the Deity worship, but that *pūjārī* will only be preaching by default. The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is a preaching mission; anyone serving in it is at least preaching by default. If we want to develop compassion, however, we will have to actually meditate on our service as part of the preaching mission and intend it as a means to distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others.

Let's draw a picture of a person who is doing little outward preaching but who has a strong desire to show compassion to others. Such a person would find a way to express that compassion. ISKCON has many channels for front line and less dramatic preaching, both among the devotees and the nondevotees. There are a variety of educational programs, including cooking classes, classes on *bhakti-yoga*, college *bhakti-yoga* clubs, *bhakti-śāstrī* courses, seminars, and *bhakti-vṛkṣa* meetings. There are literary projects, many ways to distribute books, many ways to meet people and tell them about Kṛṣṇa. There are also the more background services of Deity worship and temple administration that support the front-line preaching but also provide the environment for those who have become interested in Kṛṣṇa consciousness to develop their Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If we have an actual desire to be compassionate, nothing will stop us.

We should not negate any of these methods of preaching, and actually, we should not denigrate even the devotees who have no desire to preach. Some years ago, a questionnaire was circulated in England among the active, committed devotees. It asked them what kind of devotees had introduced them to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The majority of devotees replied that they were introduced to Kṛṣṇa by someone who was not a fully committed devotee but who was acquainted with our philosophy. Such people are often quite effective in their preaching, even if they themselves are not practicing, not only because they feel some sentiment for Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but because they move in a society to which the devotees have little



real access. Just as many devotees were introduced to Prabhupāda by people who ate at the Paradox macrobiotic restaurant in 1965, so there are people who represent our institution by their faith in Prabhupāda and who do as much for the preaching mission as any inside devotee.

We get our preaching drive from Śrīla Prabhupāda. We may ourselves balance our inclinations and nature and choose our method of preaching. Others may have ideas about what preaching actually means, but since preaching means distributing Kṛṣṇa consciousness, there are few limits as to how it may be done.

Sometimes devotees feel they are not preaching not because they lack the compassionate desire to reach out to others but because they are applying a too-rigid institutional definition of *preacher* to themselves. Often, devotees think compassion must always be shown in the form of outreach to nondevotees. They do not count preaching to one another as real preaching. Deity worship is preaching if the *pūjārīs* are using their service to the Deity to bring others closer to Kṛṣṇa. It is not enough to think, almost selfishly, only of oneself with Kṛṣṇa. When I was a temple manager, I tried to encourage the *pūjārīs* to think as much about those who were going to see the Deities as about the Deities themselves. *Pūjārīs* can invite contributions to the Deities in that mood: “When you come to the temple, please bring something, even a leaf or flower, and offer it to the Deity.” The *pūjārī* has faith that serving the Deity is beneficial for everyone, and his or her goal is to bring the devotees and the congregation closer to Kṛṣṇa. In that sense, the *pūjārī* department is more central to the temple than the book distribution department, but the two are not actually in competition. The book distributors are hoping to bring people to the temple, and the *pūjārīs* know that this is only possible if the Deity is satisfied. There is much potency in all services when devotees have a compassionate goal as their motivating force. “For one who explains this supreme secret to the devotees, pure devotional service is guaranteed, and at the end he will come back to Me. There is no servant in this world more dear to Me than he, nor will there ever be one more dear.” (Bg. 18.68–69)



## But Those Karmīs . . . Ugh!

ŚRĪLA PRABHUPĀDA TAUGHT US TO BE COMPASSIONATE and wanted us to preach, but there's a problem: when we are confronted by the things the nondevotees do, such as eating meat, drinking, smoking, or their outright sexuality, we don't feel compassion but disgust. Rather than feeling our heart soften with the desire to give them mercy and knowledge, we feel hard and condemning.

Many of the things nondevotees do to enjoy themselves *are* disgusting, but if disgust hinders the awakening of compassion in our hearts, it is a sign of neophyte consciousness. We cannot measure when we graduate from the neophyte condition by how many years we have been practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness but by our freedom from material attachment and our increasing attraction to Kṛṣṇa. Psychologists would say that when we intensely dislike something about someone, we are projecting qualities we have in ourselves. That is usually the cause of our disgust. Disgust is the flip side of attraction. To the degree that we are struggling with our own attraction to sense gratification, our dislike for the people who engage in that sense gratification will not allow us to feel compassion for them; our hearts will feel hard rather than soft.

We can examine what a great soul experiences when confronted with the grosser behaviors of the nondevotees by examining Śrīla Prabhupāda's life. Prabhupāda wasn't frightened or disgusted by what he saw. It is amazing to think of him going through so much austerity to come to America and confront the unrelenting degradation of the people here. Yet his heart didn't harden. Rather, what he saw only increased his desire to preach.

Although we stereotypically think of a Vaiṣṇava's behavior as soft and yielding, Śrīla Prabhupāda was also hard, in a sense. He always criticized the ignorance of the nondevotees that led them to commit such atrocities as animal slaughter, abortion, and to live out all the implications of the drug culture. We can hear him denouncing these things constantly in his talks. But disgust did not come with that denunciation, nor did we ever get



the sense that Prabhupāda didn't want to be with us. He told us that Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī was humble but disgusted. He felt it wasn't within his power to help the nondevotees, so he didn't preach. His own Guru Mahārāja, he said, was a fighter, and Prabhupāda was following his spiritual master. He was a fighter too, and therefore he had accepted the great challenge of coming to the West to distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He saw the difficulty immediately upon his arrival in Boston, as is recorded in his "*Mārkine Bhāgavata-dharma*":

My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, You are so kind upon this useless soul, but I do not know why You have brought me here. Now You can do whatever You like with me. But I guess You have some business here, otherwise why would You bring me to this terrible place?

Most of the population here is covered by the material modes of ignorance and passion. Absorbed in material life they think themselves very happy and satisfied and therefore they have no taste for the transcendental message of Vāsudeva. I do not know how they will be able to understand it.

But I know that Your causeless mercy can make everything possible, because You are the most expert mystic.

How will they understand the mellows of devotional service? O Lord, I am simply praying for Your mercy so that I will be able to convince them about Your message.

All living entities have come under the control of the illusory energy by Your will, and therefore, if You like, by Your will they can also be released from the clutches of illusion.

I wish that You may deliver them. Therefore if You so desire their deliverance, then only will they be able to understand Your message. . . .

How will I make them understand this message of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? I am very unfortunate, unqualified, and the most fallen. Therefore I am seeking Your benediction so that I can convince them, for I am powerless to do so on my own.

Somehow or other, O Lord, You have brought me here to speak about You. Now, my Lord, it is up to You to make me a success or failure, as You like.

O spiritual master of all the worlds! I can simply repeat Your message. So if You like You can make my power of speaking suitable for their understanding.



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Only by Your causeless mercy will my words become pure. I am sure that when this transcendental message penetrates their hearts, they will certainly feel gladdened and thus become liberated from all unhappy conditions of life.

O Lord, I am just like a puppet in Your hands. So if You have brought me here to dance, then make me dance, make me dance, O Lord, make me dance as You like.

I have no devotion, nor do I have any knowledge, but I have strong faith in the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. I have been designated as Bhaktivedanta, and now, if You like, You can fulfill the real purport of Bhaktivedanta.

Signed—the most unfortunate, insignificant beggar,  
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami,  
Onboard the ship *Jaladuta*, Commonwealth Pier,  
Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.  
Dated 18th September 1965

Despite what Prabhupāda saw on his first walk through the streets of Boston and later through the streets of New York, he felt his compassion awakening and prayed to Kṛṣṇa to help him make the path of *bhakti* understandable to the American people. His first year in America was especially difficult with no financial or moral support and very little interest in his teachings, but instead of returning to Vṛndāvana hopeless, he was patient, determined, and imbued with a sense of kindness toward these spirit souls who had so fallen from their constitutional position. He did not see the degradation as much as he saw the truth of the souls' natural relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

But that didn't mean it was easy. We who have been raised in the West can appreciate Śrīla Prabhupāda's austerities—what it must have been like for a pure Vaiṣṇava to leave Vṛndāvana to live in New York City during the 1960s, to see the young men bearded, long-haired, and dirty, the scantily dressed young women, the stores selling meat, the intense mood of sense gratification of the place. He didn't become cynical or hard, and he didn't hate people for their ignorance. He remained always open to anyone who would take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, even if they came before him naked, as happened on his visit to Morning Star Ranch. One



of the men who became a devotee after Prabhupāda's visit to Morning Star said, "He didn't see our bodies but our souls. He was a great soul."

For Prabhupāda's followers, his tolerance and mercy toward our fallen ways is one of the ways we measure how great he was. At the *mahotsava* held just after Prabhupāda's disappearance in 1977, one of Prabhupāda's Godbrothers said that he too had gone to the West, but it was not his nature to deal with low-class people. His implication was that Prabhupāda had such a nature. But we know that Prabhupāda was the highest Vaiṣṇava experiencing great compassion for the fallen.

Prabhupāda's compassion was not ruled by emotion but by intelligence. He didn't just feel sorry for the conditioned souls but thought carefully how to uplift them. Then he worked to do so. If he saw that something he was doing was not effective, he changed his tactics. He never lost sight of his goal to bring the people he met (or met through his followers) to spiritual awakening. He was flexible in his approach, concentrating on education but using other means to attract people to receive it. Although he often decried mundane welfare work, he encouraged the devotees to use food distribution to attract both good publicity and the public. However, it should not be *food* distribution but *prasādam* distribution.

He was also personally tolerant. If he had not possessed the qualities of tolerance and compassion, he would have had to return to India. He was a strict Vaiṣṇava and did not compromise in his speech, yet he accepted any inconvenience in order to preach. Until he moved into his own place at 26 Second Avenue, he had to share the refrigerator with his meat-eating hosts. Often, his hosts smoked cigarettes, took drugs, or did other things that would have been intolerable to a Vaiṣṇava of lesser strength. He simply accepted whatever conditions Kṛṣṇa provided, realizing that in the beginning, he was a beggar in these Western countries. Although he could have returned to Vṛndāvana and been offered the respect due an elderly *sādhū*, he tolerated everything just so he could preach.

While writing this book, a devotee wrote me a letter which included the following question: "Because devotees are trying to practice spiritual life in an environment which is alien to their purposes, it seems we are becoming more and more insular, both to protect ourselves and to avoid having to associate with those who cannot understand our purpose. How can we feel compassion if we have this consciousness?"



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We can take our cue from Śrīla Prabhupāda. First, we can feel the fortune of our own position, feel grateful that we have *prasādam* at every meal, that we have the holy name, and that we have the opportunity to hear the Absolute Truth spoken every day. Second, we can try to understand Prabhupāda's kindness and tolerance, and we can let those qualities inspire us to want to share our wealth with others. We may not always be feeling compassionate toward others, but at the very least, we can, inspired by Prabhupāda's example, serve his compassionate cause.

ISKCON is an insular world. We have our own language, our own stock phrases, our own outlooks, and our own circle of friends. That's natural and necessary in the development of our Vaiṣṇava subculture within the culture of sense gratification. We are different from others because our goal is different. Our insular world is necessary for our survival. But we should never become so insular that we do not reach out to anyone who is suffering.

# *Facing the Weight of Prabhupāda's Order to Preach*

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ŚRĪLA PRABHUPĀDA HAS SAID MANY TIMES that distributing Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the best welfare work, because it is the only service we can offer others that will free them from the cycle of birth and death. This is certainly better than improving their material standard of living or their concentration on the animal propensities of eating, mating, sleeping, and defending. There are people who do need to be clothed, fed, and housed, but *all* people need spiritual emancipation. Kṛṣṇa gives the human being special facility not to become absorbed in superior standards of sense gratification but to realize himself and his relationship with God and to leave the material world behind. Animals are not given that intelligence. Human beings should not be left to work only for the animal propensities because they lack knowledge. Prabhupāda wanted us to teach Kṛṣṇa consciousness and to free others while we worked to free ourselves.

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* contains several stark definitions of material lust: "Material society, friendship and love are all different phases of lust. Home, country, family, society, wealth and all sorts of corollaries are all causes of bondage in the material world, where the threefold miseries of life are concomitant factors." (*Bhāg.* 1.10.11–12, purport)

And this famous purport:

The completely bewildered material civilization is wrongly directed towards the fulfillment of desires in sense gratification. In such civilization, in all spheres of life, the ultimate end is sense gratification. In politics, social service, altruism, philanthropy and ultimately in religion or even in salvation, the very same tint of sense gratification is ever-increasingly predominant. In the political field the leaders of men fight with one another to fulfill their personal sense gratification. The voters adore the so-called leaders only when they promise sense gratification. As soon as the voters are dissatisfied in their own sense satisfaction, they dethrone the leaders. The leaders must always disappoint the voters by



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not satisfying their senses. The same is applicable in all other fields; no one is serious about the problems of life. Even those who are on the path of salvation desire to become one with the Absolute Truth and desire to commit spiritual suicide for sense gratification. But the *Bhāgavatam* says that one should not live for sense gratification. One should satisfy the senses only inasmuch as required for self-preservation, and not for sense gratification.

—*Bhāg.* 1.2.10, purport

Śrīla Prabhupāda goes on to say that because the body is made of senses, it requires a certain amount of satisfaction, but human beings should satisfy their senses under regulation so that they do not lose sight of the goal of life. He gives the example of marriage as a way to regulate the sex urge, then adds, “In the absence of voluntary restraint, there is propaganda for family planning, but foolish men do not know that family planning is automatically executed as soon as there is search after the Absolute Truth.” The purport continues:

Seekers of the Absolute Truth are never allured by unnecessary engagements in sense gratification because the serious students seeking the Absolute Truth are always overwhelmed with the work of researching the Truth. In every sphere of life, therefore, the ultimate end must be seeking after the Absolute Truth, and that sort of engagement will make one happy because he will be less engaged in varieties of sense gratification.

By studying Prabhupāda’s books, we must face the fact that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not unnatural to the heart of any living entity. It is only their (our) conditioning that separates us from being happy in pure love of God. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

*Akāmah* is one who has no material desire. A living being, naturally being the part and parcel of the supreme whole *puruṣam pūrṇam*, has as his natural function to serve the Supreme Being, just as the parts and parcels of the body, or the limbs of the body, are naturally meant to serve the complete body. Desireless means, therefore, not to be inert like the stone, but to be conscious of one’s actual position and



thus desire satisfaction only from the Supreme Lord. . . . This means that one should feel happy only by experiencing the happiness of the Supreme Lord. This intuition of the living being is sometimes manifested even during the conditioned stage of a living being in the material world, and such intuition is expressed in the manner of altruism, philanthropy, socialism, communism, etc., by the undeveloped minds of less intelligent persons. In the mundane field such an outlook of doing good to others in the form of society, community, family, country or humanity is a partial manifestation of the same original feeling in which a pure living entity feels happiness by the happiness of the Supreme Lord. . . . *Kāma* spirit, or the desire for one's own satisfaction, is fully exhibited in the material world, whereas the spirit of *akāmaḥ* is fully exhibited in the spiritual world.

—*Bhāg.* 2.3.10, purport

The soul's natural urge is to serve Kṛṣṇa selflessly. If we can follow the path of the compassionate preacher, we can help both ourselves and others reawaken that urge and direct it onto the *bhakti* path.

But as devotees, we may be facing obstacles in our willingness to feel compassion for others. There are two usual obstacles. One is our lack of conviction about the nature of other people's suffering, or our lack of concern, and the other is the difficulty of preaching work itself.

To confront the first obstacle, we should practice *sādhana*, especially hearing. If we can actually become convinced that Kṛṣṇa is God, that we are meant to serve Him, and that life has little meaning otherwise—and if we can remember our own fruitless experiences before hearing from Prabhupāda—we will naturally feel the urge to share what we know with others. By hearing, we will also learn and gradually become convinced of the fact that sharing Kṛṣṇa consciousness with others will make us dear to guru and Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa considers it a victory when a conditioned soul turns to Him.

Preaching is the appropriate *guru-dakṣiṇā* that should be offered in return for the spiritual master's instructions. Even as early as 1966, at my own initiation, Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed us that he was giving us knowledge, and we were now becoming obliged, by accepting initiation, to disseminate it widely. This, he said, was to be our *guru-dakṣiṇā*. I remember being struck for the first time by the concept of our owing the spiritual



master for the teachings he was so freely giving. This in itself defines the reason Prabhupāda's followers are interested in preaching: We have been lifted up; now Prabhupāda wants us to help others.

Most of us don't find it too difficult to overcome this obstacle. The harder obstacle to overcome is that preaching is difficult. People tend to suspect our motives because many of them have been cheated in the past. Because they have been cheated, they tend to be cynical, if not toward all religion, at least toward ours. Sometimes their cynicism finds a foothold in our own hearts when we look at our often poor practices and lack of Kṛṣṇa conscious absorption. Besides that, people usually already have their own beliefs; do we have a right to try to change them? Very few people are themselves questioning what they believe. What may be the most difficult consideration of all is that we present Kṛṣṇa consciousness as the only way. How is that different from what any other religionist is doing? We consider those others sectarian; are we guilty of the same?

So we must both face the implications of Prabhupāda's instruction and our own doubts. Ultimately, we have to become convinced that people really will become happy by taking up the Kṛṣṇa conscious process. Specifically, this means people should hear the holy name. We should have great faith in the holy name's power to effect changes in the hearer's heart. If people will just hear it—or if we can insist that they hear it by filling the ether with it—they can begin their spiritual lives. This is because Kṛṣṇa is nondifferent from His name. *Nāma cintāmaṇiḥ-kṛṣṇaś caitanya-rasa-vigrahaḥ, pūrṇaḥ śuddho nitya-mukto 'bhinnatvān nāma-nāminoḥ*. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “[Kṛṣṇa's] name is full. As Kṛṣṇa is full, complete, similarly, Kṛṣṇa's name is also full, complete. *Śuddha*. It is not material things. *Pūrṇaḥ śuddhaḥ nityaḥ*. Eternal. As Kṛṣṇa is eternal, His name is also eternal. *Pūrṇaḥ śuddhaḥ nitya-muktaḥ*. There is no material conception in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.” (Lecture, London, August 8, 1973)

Ultimately, all preaching centers on *kīrtana*; our goal is to bring people to their own appreciation of and surrender to the holy name: “As far as possible, therefore, the devotees in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement gather to chant the holy names of Kṛṣṇa in public so that both the chanters and the listeners may benefit.” (Cc. *Antya* 1.101, purport) Whatever it takes to strengthen our realization of this point, we should do.



## *Vaiṣṇava Compassion*

Compassion is an important part of a Vaiṣṇava's life. It is not an incidental quality. The price to attain real compassion, however, is high. To attain it we have to be prepared to make sacrifices, and we have to give up selfishness. We also have to renounce pride. Śrīla Prabhupāda cited the mood of the uncompassionate when he said, "Let me be saved; let others rot in hell." That is not the mood of a Vaiṣṇava. A Vaiṣṇava would say, "Let others be saved; let me rot in hell on their behalf." The willingness to feel that and to carry it out if necessary is the cost of true compassion.

Prahlāda Mahārāja prays:

O best of the great personalities, I am not at all afraid of material existence, for wherever I stay I am fully absorbed in thoughts of Your glories and activities. My concern is only for the fools and rascals who are making elaborate plans for material happiness and maintaining their families, societies and countries. I am simply concerned with love for them.

My dear Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva, I see that there are many saintly persons indeed, but they are interested only in their own deliverance. Not caring for the big cities and towns, they go to the Himalayas or the forest to meditate with vows of silence [*mauna-vrata*]. They are not interested in delivering others. As for me, however, I do not wish to be liberated alone, leaving aside all these poor fools and rascals. I know that without Kṛṣṇa consciousness, without taking shelter of Your lotus feet, one cannot be happy. Therefore I wish to bring them back to shelter at Your lotus feet.

—*Bhāg.* 7.9.43–44

In his purport to text 44, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

This is the decision of the Vaiṣṇava, the pure devotee of the Lord. For himself he has no problems, even if he has to stay in this material world, because his only business is to remain in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The Kṛṣṇa conscious person can go even to hell and still be happy. . . . For a devotee, being situated in the heavenly planets and being in the hellish planets are equal, for a devotee lives neither in heaven nor in hell but with Kṛṣṇa in the spiritual world. . . . The devotee . . . is not interested in so-called meditation in the Himalayas or the forest. Rather, his interest is in the busiest part of the world, where he teaches people



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Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement was started for this purpose. . . . A Vaiṣṇava like Prahlaḍa Mahārāja . . . is interested in enlightening people in Kṛṣṇa consciousness because that is the only way for them to become happy. . . . One wanders within the universe, life after life, but by the grace of a devotee, a servant of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, one can get the clue to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and then not only become happy in this world but also return home, back to Godhead. . . . The members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement must be fully convinced that without Kṛṣṇa one cannot be happy.

Many religions share this principle. In Christianity, they have the concept that Christ literally died for the sins of others; in Buddhism, they have the concept of Bodhisattva, one who vows not to accept liberation until all others are liberated. Besides Prahlaḍa Mahārāja, we have the example of Vāsudeva Datta, who begged Lord Caitanya to allow him to take the karma of all other living beings so that they could go back to Godhead. For himself, he was prepared to rot in hell. Because of this attitude, Lord Caitanya declared, “I am only Vāsudeva Datta’s man. My body is only meant to please Vāsudeva Datta, and he can sell Me anywhere.’ Thrice He vowed that this was a fact and that no one should disbelieve these statements.” (Cc. *Ādi* 10.41, purport)

Earlier I mentioned obstacles to preaching—that we may not have enough knowledge about Kṛṣṇa consciousness or realization of material suffering to evoke compassion in ourselves, or that we fear Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a sectarian concern. Another obstacle is our nature. Prabhupāda was like a general on the battlefield, and although we all want to serve him, many of us don’t have his boldness. We are not unwilling to preach; we may simply be timid. It may be too hard for some of us to go out and meet people cold. Is such timidity an *anartha* to be rooted out, or is it possible that a timid nature can be useful to the preaching mission? If it can be used, how? Did Prabhupāda want only devotees with soldierlike courage, or is there room for other kinds of people?

Devotees seem to be asking these questions more these days than they did in the past. Perhaps it’s because when we look at ISKCON, we’re not sure if we should be returning to the grand old days when devotees went out for six hours a day of *harināma* and/or book distribution, or moving



onto something different. There is certainly a revivalist movement within ISKCON, calling for devotees to go back to that earlier surrender to outreach preaching. The revivalists prescribe that old formula as a way to bring us all together again, remembering how spiritually charged this movement once was.

It is not the purpose of my book to answer such questions, but I would like to both identify myself as a timid devotee and to give encouragement to those who face the same obstacle in their nature. The question is, is it necessary to become something else—an outgoing preacher—if that is not what we are? The other side of that question, of course, is whether others should find it necessary to force us out of our timidity in the name of the preaching mission.

First, I would like to say that if being timid stops us from trying to preach altogether, it is something we can work to overcome. Second, there are many, many ways to preach. Any devotee who has a desire to be compassionate can find a way to preach. There is a point where mental life gets in the way of preaching, and when we overcome it—we go out on *harināma* or to distribute books or to approach people at one kind of gathering or another—we feel cleansed. I have personally experienced that phenomenon whenever I have gone out on *harināma*. We often think we don't want to go, but when we surrender to it and actually participate in the merciful distribution of the holy name, we usually feel wonderful afterwards. When we sacrifice something for Kṛṣṇa's service, Kṛṣṇa always reciprocates.

In my own devotional career, I worked hard to overcome my reclusive nature in order to serve my spiritual master. I distributed a lot of BTGs, hawking them at St. Mark's Square in New York City and in different places in Boston, and although asking people for donations was particularly difficult for me, we always needed the money, so the service felt rewarding even on that level.

But there's a difference between surrendering to a particular form of preaching service and answering the question, "Do I have a vocation for this?" Each individual will have to examine him or herself to respond to that. For those who feel they do not have a career in front-line, outreach preaching, I would like to offer encouragement. There is a place for us in Prabhupāda's movement. We should honor those devotees who can make a career of the types of front line preaching more timid devotees never



feel comfortable doing, and we should be creative in our attempts to be compassionate and find a way to preach. What we shouldn't do is avoid Prabhupāda's instruction that all his followers should preach.

Actually, even the not-so-timid devotees have to be creative in their preaching. Most of the devotees in the movement now are established *gṛhasthas*, and it's likely that the younger devotees will follow them into that *āśrama*. ISKCON is not full of *brahmacāris* the way it was twenty-five years ago. Therefore, the needs of our society have changed. It is romantic to think that we *can* take up six hours of *harināma* a day, because someone will still have to pay our bills. Neither are devotees inclined to move back into the communal situation of the 1970s.

Therefore, what can someone with a desire to share Kṛṣṇa consciousness do? Perhaps we can answer that question by examining what devotees are already doing. First, they can be upstanding citizens in the eyes of the outside world. There are some communities around the world who have presented themselves to the nondevotee public as serious, hardworking, and religiously-minded people. They build that reputation by being honest, decent people. It's hard to say whether the outside world would see us in quite the same way if we were still presenting ourselves as religious gypsies.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to distribute books. He saw that as the most important form of preaching. He agreed that if people gave a donation upon receiving one of his books, their spiritual life would begin (*ajñāta-sukṛti*). If they actually read the book, however, they could become attracted to Kṛṣṇa and potentially go back to Godhead in this lifetime. Some devotees feel our usual methods of book distribution do not concentrate on encouraging people to read Prabhupāda's books. From that concern, many other forms of book distribution have arisen. Some devotees spend time writing introductory booklets to help people better approach Prabhupāda's books, others try to distribute the books in less active circumstances—going door to door or setting up tables on college lawns, for example. Other devotees become involved in *nāma-haṭṭa* meetings, and instead of constantly meeting strangers, try to get to know a smaller number of people. Some devotees cultivate their nondevotee acquaintances, sharing *prasādam* and being friendly. And there are those who preach to the devotees.

Preaching now means to give people a chance to serve Kṛṣṇa from any position. Most of us no longer recruit people to move into the temple.



We no longer expect them to change their lives in such drastic ways but assume that they will stay at home, work at their jobs, and raise their families while bringing Kṛṣṇa consciousness into their homes.

Along with our ISKCON definition of front-line preaching, the Vedic scriptures provide another idea from the life of Śrīla Vyāsadeva: “Out of compassion, the great sage thought it wise that this would enable men to achieve the ultimate goal of life. Thus he compiled the great historical narration called the *Mahābhārata* for women, laborers and friends of the twice-born.” (*Bhāg.* 1.4.25) The sages lived a renounced life and wrote books. Śrīla Prabhupāda also comments on the Six Gosvāmīs:

Because of their compassion for the poor fallen souls, the six Gosvāmīs gave up their exalted positions as ministers and took vows as mendicants. Thus minimizing their bodily wants as far as possible, they each accepted only a loincloth and a begging bowl. Thus they remained in Vṛndāvana to execute the orders of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu by compiling and publishing various Vaiṣṇava literatures.

—*Bhāg.* 5.1.26, purport

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books themselves are compassionate books, and devotees may also choose to express their compassion by writing books following in his footsteps.

As devotees are writing their books, we’re finding that the dichotomy between preaching to nondevotees and preaching to devotees is less distinct. Many devotees are finding their preaching service in the budding ISKCON educational movement—teaching *bhakti-śāstrī*, giving seminars or workshops, as well as our usual scriptural classes. Such preaching-education is intelligent care for those who have come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, because it’s not enough to preach to nondevotees if we don’t care for those who come. Devotees must have the opportunity to continue to advance beyond their initial infatuation with spiritual life. Educational training allows us to do that.

Prabhupāda sometimes said that the *Bhagavad-gītā* can be read *only* by devotees. He said the spiritual master speaks to devotees, but sometimes, out of compassion, holds an open class so nondevotees can benefit. I once asked Śrīla Prabhupāda about this. I wondered if the teaching, “You’re not



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this body,” wasn’t for the nondevotees. No, he said, that too was for devotees. Only devotees can understand such things.

Then how does a devotee show compassion toward the nondevotees? *Harināma*, *prasādam* distribution, colorful festivals, and enough philosophy to attract them to Kṛṣṇa.

Therefore, strictly speaking, everything in ISKCON can be called preaching—everything from the most direct forms of book distribution to our farm communities in the country, guest house construction, accounting and management, and public relations. As long as the devotees do not forget their compassionate purpose and do not seek name and fame, the preaching movement will go forward. Timid or bold, there is room in this wide variety of activities for every devotee.

And what does timid mean, anyway? Sometimes it simply means *contemplative*. There is no one way to find God, just as there is no one way to preach. We need to accommodate all types of persons who have the potential to take up spiritual life.

## If Prabhupāda was a Mahā-bhāgavata, Why Did He Preach?

COMPASSION BY DEFINITION IS AN EMOTION felt when one perceives another in a suffering condition. In a sense, that puts the sufferer in a lower position. That is proper, because mercy always flows downward, not upward. But the scriptures define a *mahā-bhāgavata* as someone situated in the fullest expression of Kṛṣṇa conscious humility; he sees no one in need of mercy but everyone as perfectly situated under Kṛṣṇa's control.

Does this mean that a *mahā-bhāgavata* feels no compassion? If so, why do we accept the *mahā-bhāgavata*'s mood as the highest expression of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Why do we accept Śrīla Prabhupāda as a *mahā-bhāgavata*, yet consider preaching (compassion) the most important service?

Nowadays, with the influx into ISKCON of teachings from Gaudiya Math gurus, Śrīla Prabhupāda's commitment to preaching is often brought into question, as if it were something lower than *bhājana*. If he himself is not questioned, then devotees are told that preaching was something Prabhupāda insisted upon so that his unpurified, unqualified disciples would have something to do while they were waiting to become cleansed. When they became purified, they would no longer be focused on preaching but on relishing devotional mellows through an intense practice of personal *sādhana*.

How can we answer this challenge? Is it just a question of difference in emphasis between Śrīla Prabhupāda and other Gauḍīya spiritual masters, or is there an absolute answer by which we can justify our acceptance of Prabhupāda's mood as topmost?

First, we should understand that the *mahā-bhāgavata* does feel the suffering of others. The advanced devotee is *para-duḥkha-duḥkhī*, "in other words, he has no personal troubles, but he is very unhappy to see others in trouble." (*Bhāg.* 6.1.6, purport)

Although preaching is not meant for a *mahā-bhāgavata*, a *mahā-bhāgavata* can descend to the platform of *madhyama-bhāgavata* just to convert others to Vaiṣṇavism. Actually a *mahā-bhāgavata* is fit to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, but he does not distinguish where Kṛṣṇa consciousness



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should be spread from where it should not. He thinks that everyone is competent to accept Kṛṣṇa consciousness if the chance is provided. . . .

“One who is expert in Vedic literature and has full faith in the Supreme Lord, is an *uttama-adbhikāri*, a first-class Vaiṣṇava, a topmost Vaiṣṇava who can deliver the whole world and turn everyone to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” (Cc. *Madhya* 22.65) With great love and affection, the *mahā-bhāgavata* observes the Supreme Personality of Godhead, devotional service and the devotee. He observes nothing beyond Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa consciousness and Kṛṣṇa’s devotees. The *mahā-bhāgavata* knows that everyone is engaged in the Lord’s service in different ways. He therefore descends to the middle platform to elevate everyone to the Kṛṣṇa conscious position.

—Cc. *Madhya* 16.74, purport

What does it mean that the *mahā-bhāgavata* “descends” to the *madh-yama* platform? This does not mean that the *mahā-bhāgavata* relinquishes his advanced devotional status, but that he agrees to see distinctions between the demonic and the innocent, and to work to give the innocent an opportunity to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This is how a *mahā-bhāgavata* preaches. Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to the *mahā-bhāgavata* preacher in his purport to *Bhāg.* 4.22.16:

The *karmīs*, who have a bodily concept of life, try to enjoy sense gratification to the utmost. The *jñānīs*’ idea of the highest position is merging into the effulgence of the Lord. But a devotee’s highest position is in preaching all over the world the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore the devotees are actually the representatives of the Supreme Lord, and as such they travel all over the world directly as Nārāyaṇa because they carry Nārāyaṇa within their hearts and preach His glories.

To understand *para-duḥkha-duḥkhī*, we can think of the example of a father with a wayward son. The father is happy within his own life. If his son becomes a vagabond, in a sense, the father’s peaceful activities at home are not disturbed, but he thinks always of his son and feels incomplete without him. Similarly, a *mahā-bhāgavata* sees only Kṛṣṇa everywhere, but still, as a Vaiṣṇava he feels compassion and thus chooses to accept the *madhyama* mood in order to help those suffering from a lack of



Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In one sense, the vision of the *mahā-bhāgavata* and the vision of the *madhyama-bhāgavata* cannot be compared. One sees that all persons are engaged perfectly in Kṛṣṇa's plan; the other discriminates between those who are serving Kṛṣṇa voluntarily and those who are not. We should be careful not to measure one understanding against the other in a material way.

Therefore, we should also be careful about trying to assess Śrīla Prabhupāda's preaching mood in a material way. How can anyone say that Prabhupāda's desire to alleviate the suffering of the conditioned souls is a lesser position than constant absorption in some other form of devotional service? And the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda engaged his disciples in the preaching mission simply to purify them is not complete:

*A mahā-bhāgavata*, being empowered by the Supreme Lord, Yogeśvara, is endowed with the supernatural power to inspire and give success to the *madhyama-adbhikāri* who follows in his footsteps and to elevate a *kaniṣṭha-adbhikāri* gradually to the intermediate platform. Such devotional power springs automatically from the ocean of mercy found within the heart of a pure devotee. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura points out that a *mahā-bhāgavata* has no desire to inflict punishment on the enemies of the Lord. Rather, he engages the *madhyama-adbhikāris* and *kaniṣṭha-adbhikāris* in preaching work to purify the polluted mentality of the inimical souls, who are falsely imagining the material world to be separate from Kṛṣṇa.

—*Bhāg.* 11.2.45, purport

By engaging his *kaniṣṭha* and *madhyama* disciples in preaching, the *mahā-bhāgavata* spiritual master both elevates them and fulfills his own desire to elevate all conditioned souls. Preaching, for Prabhupāda, was not just a fill-in activity for his disciples until they became more advanced; it was Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The challenge that preaching is a lesser form of Kṛṣṇa consciousness than *bhajana* cannot be completely proved by pointing out Śrīla Prabhupāda's behavior or the behavior of any of the *ācāryas* in our line, because there are *ācāryas* who did not make preaching their main occupation. The Six Gosvāmīs retired to Vṛndāvana and wrote books on *tattva* and *rasa*. The purpose of these books was to please and elevate the devotees, and in the



case of the books on *tattva*, to convince those who were not devotees to take to the worship of Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, it can be said that they both relished *vraja-bhāva* and distributed it to others. Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī's main practice was *bhajana*, yet he initiated Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, who preached all over India. Then how to reconcile the challenge that preaching is less important than relishing *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā*?

One simple way is to refer to the first principles in practicing *bhakti*. That is, *gurupādāśraya*, accepting the shelter of a bona fide spiritual master, and receiving and following his instructions with faith and confidence. In Śrīla Prabhupāda's case, he accepted the shelter of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura and was instructed to preach. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was himself carrying on the mission of his father, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, and both were in line with Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Lord Caitanya Himself preached during His early years, then when He retired to relish the mood of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī in separation from Kṛṣṇa, He sent Lord Nityānanda and many other preachers out. Following in their footsteps, Prabhupāda had both faith in his guru's order and enough personal compassion to carry it out in an unsurpassed way.

It is characteristic of the *mahā-bhāgavata* to depend fully on Kṛṣṇa for his maintenance. We can see in Prabhupāda's life that he lived fully in Kṛṣṇa's shelter. He crossed the ocean with only the equivalent of eight dollars in his pocket and entered a different world. The foreignness must have been shocking at first, but Prabhupāda prayed to Kṛṣṇa to guide him, as a puppeteer guides a marionette. Without any outward support, Prabhupāda entered the American jungle and convinced people who had never heard of Kṛṣṇa to surrender their lives to Him.

Ultimately, the question does come down to a difference in emphasis between those who have absorbed themselves in the service of preaching and those who have chosen to absorb themselves only in *bhajana*. Whatever it is, as Śrīla Prabhupāda's followers we must follow Prabhupāda's example and take up the mood our spiritual master prescribed. There is something wonderful about becoming absorbed in our own spiritual master's mood, something complete, and something required if we wish to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We should not lose the opportunity to do so by relativizing his instructions or Kṛṣṇa conscious passions. When His Holiness Śrīdhara Mahārāja was asked whether the preaching spirit was



the highest expression of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he said, “No, that’s just the party spirit of the preachers.” Śrīdhara Mahārāja’s statement makes logical sense, but we still have to see that Prabhupāda said something different. He definitely said that the *goṣṭhyānandī* is higher than the *bhajanānandī*. Should we conclude that Prabhupāda had some kind of party spirit? No, we accept what he said at face value. And if other members of the Gaudiya Math have a different emphasis, we have to follow Prabhupāda anyway. Prabhupāda says we should preach.

Prabhupāda’s followers should not feel intimidated by others’ attempt to create a dichotomy between preaching and *bhajana*. Nothing Śrīla Prabhupāda said is untrue. He told us that as Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, we must learn to practice *vraja-bhakti*, and that requires careful hearing about Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Their Vṛndāvana pastimes. He also told us that practicing *rāgānugā-bhakti* is a high standard, not something that can be achieved by cheap imitation of advanced devotees or any other form of cheating. The ability to practice advanced Kṛṣṇa consciousness takes qualification. Qualification comes both by following the spiritual master’s instructions and by developing our inner life of Kṛṣṇa conscious meditation, prayer, and chanting. Śrīla Prabhupāda certainly wanted us to do both so that we could attain the highest goal of Vṛndāvana *bhakti*. There too the dichotomy is reconciled. As Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī said, “The best *goṣṭhyānandī* is a *bhajanānandī* who preaches.”



## According to Our Capacity

WITH ALL THIS TALK OF COMPASSION, of feeling or not feeling compassion, and of following the compassionate preacher, devotees need to face an equally relevant point: “What is my realistic capacity to express compassion in the face of who I am and the world in which I am being asked to preach?” Do we need to be pure to deliver the holy name? Is anything required of the recipients?

To be truly compassionate requires faith. When we distribute the holy name, we are not just trying to help people hear *kṛṣṇa-nāma* but to awaken faith in their hearts. If we are faithless, how can we plant the seed of faith in others? The holy name itself is like fire—it will act on the heart of the hearer as He chooses—but Kṛṣṇa has arranged for the holy name to be delivered through the devotees. Receiving the holy name is meant to be an exchange between devotees and anyone who will hear.

I don’t think it’s necessary for a devotee to be so advanced before he or she begins to distribute the holy name. Sincerity of purpose is a good beginning. Compassion is a devotional quality that will grow with our practice of *sādhana-bhakti*. Therefore, until we feel a rise of personal compassion, we can hear from the compassionate teacher and serve his mission.

But even when we become more advanced devotees, our compassion may never reach the depth of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s compassion, or the mood that Lord Caitanya expressed. We shouldn’t expect that. Instead, we will have to be satisfied to express compassion according to our capacity.

In his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.21.33, Prabhupāda writes:

The question may be raised that since the Lord is supposed to be worshiped by great demigods like Lord Brahmā, Lord Śiva and others, how can an ordinary human being on this planet serve Him? This is clearly explained by Pṛthu Mahārāja by the use of the word *yathādbhikāra*, “according to one’s ability.” If one sincerely executes his occupational duty, that will be sufficient. One does not need to become like Lord Brahmā, Lord Śiva, Indra, Lord Caitanya or Rāmānujācārya, whose capabilities are certainly far above ours. Even a *śūdra*, who is in the lowest stage of life according to the material qualities, can achieve



the same success. Anyone can become successful in devotional service provided he displays no duplicity. It is explained here that one must be very frank and open-minded (*amāyinaḥ*). To be situated in a lower status of life is not a disqualification for success in devotional service. The only qualification is that whether one is a *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* or *śūdra*, he must be open, frank and free from reservations. Then, by performing his particular occupational duty under the guidance of a proper spiritual master, he can achieve the highest success in life.

Śrīla Prabhupāda is not specifically discussing compassion in this purport but general devotional service. Still, it is applicable. We are not disqualified from expressing our own compassion even if we are in a “lower status of life.” We should not become paralyzed by our lack of qualification in devotional service. It is also indicated here that we can express whatever devotion we have not only according to our capacity but according to our nature, our *varṇa*, and our *āśrama*. We do not have to share a generic expression, but we can work as individuals. A *kṣatriya* does not show his compassion in the same way as a *brāhmaṇa* or *śūdra*.

The basis of our desire to share Kṛṣṇa consciousness will still be our own faith in it. Although there have been many abuses perpetrated in the name of preaching, to whatever degree one of the underlying motivations to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness was faith in the process, to that degree it was effective. It is within our capacity to weed out selfishness in our spiritual lives, if only gradually, and as we do so, our preaching will become more effective. It is within our power to desire and seek purity. Purity includes freedom from the desire to exploit others. We are often not so pure, but if we are striving, our capacity to feel compassion will increase. Ultimately, we have to have faith in our own chanting. That will give us the strength to both make advancement and share Kṛṣṇa consciousness with others.

Giving compassion according to our capacity and nature rather than always according to an imposed formula will also help us deepen our faith. I have found that true with my own writing. Being a writer is a deep part of myself; it is not something that will easily be eradicated. Therefore, let me use my desire and ability to write to show compassion to others. There are many examples in world literature of persons who tried to do the same



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thing. I think of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his famous poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The poem was well crafted according to rhyme, meter, and metaphor, but it contained an important message which Coleridge hoped readers would take seriously. Coleridge was a romantic poet, interested in the supernatural, believing more in the innate goodness of human beings rather than their natural degradation, and revering nature.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" tells the story of an old seaman who stops a man on his way to a wedding to tell his story. The seaman had needlessly shot an albatross, a bird of good omen, and his crew had hung the bird around his neck as a remembrance. Afterwards, the ship went through a series of ill adventures, resting for days on a becalmed sea, with the hot sun shining down upon them, the crew dying of thirst.

Water, water, every where,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, every where,  
Nor any drop to drink.

As the mariner, now alone on the ship, looks over the ship's side in his distress, seeing the sea full of life, he despises it. Then he tries to pray:

But or ever a prayer had gusht,  
A wicked whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust.

Later, he again looks over the ship's side, and sees water snakes moving in "tracks of shining white," and this time he feels happy that they are alive:

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware.

This recognition of the sea snakes as creatures of God frees him from the curse that was placed upon him for killing the albatross. Thus he is saved. After returning to land, he finds that he must periodically tell the

story of what happened to him to help his fellow humans become more kind to God's creatures. The mariner's words come to an end with the famous lines:

He prayeth well, who loveth well  
Both man and bird and beast.  
He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

I tell this story to show how the Kṛṣṇa conscious message too can be told in a non-didactic way if we are free to express it from our own hearts in our own way. Literature is only one among many ways to express it. Personally, I take inspiration from the many writers who have come before me and managed to express great sentiments. I who have been given the gift of Kṛṣṇa consciousness have that much more to give, and I should also work to encourage others to take to devotional service in a non-didactic way—because I myself am not so attracted by the didactic message. Literature (or other cultural expressions) should reach out with its compassionate message, and not just provide a sensitive telling of events or lives, but help people get in touch with their own feelings. Kṛṣṇa conscious culture should awaken people's devotion. People often don't have the power to put into words what they are feeling; literature and other forms of art can help them do that. In that sense, culture is as uplifting as any more apparently direct expression of compassion. Not only does it help people bring out their own feelings, but it can remain available for generations.

We have to be careful not to be too glib in how we define compassion, or how we see our own expression of it. Kṛṣṇa will accept what we can do according to our capacity, but we shouldn't mistake self-interest for compassion. We can follow our natures in how we express ourselves, but we still have the responsibility to actually make offerings to Kṛṣṇa of what we do and what we are.



## Misplaced, Mundane Compassion?

COMPASSION IS A LOFTY IDEA. At our best, when we are driven by compassion we strive constantly to rescue others from the great mistake of bodily identification and help them become fixed in their spiritual identity where they can at last taste true happiness. Such an accomplishment takes incredible selflessness, untiring dedication, and a strong and secure personal understanding and practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Often, however, in our attempt to reach the ideal, we bypass the very human expressions of kindness and consideration that are the qualities of a compassionate heart. Devotees have even been afraid that too many acts of kindness and consideration are signs of mundane compassion, and that we have lost our sense of the spiritual mission. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrīla Prabhupāda draws the distinction between mundane compassion and spiritual action quite clearly. The *Bhagavad-gītā* states: “When the son of Kuntī, Arjuna, saw all these different grades of friends and relatives, he became overwhelmed with compassion and spoke thus. . . . My dear Kṛṣṇa, seeing my friends and relatives present before me in such a fighting spirit, I feel the limbs of my body quivering and my mouth drying up.” (Bg. 1.27–28) Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

Any man who has genuine devotion to the Lord has all the good qualities which are found in godly persons or in the demigods, whereas the nondevotee, however advanced he may be in material qualifications by education and culture, lacks in godly qualities. As such, Arjuna, just after seeing his kinsmen, friends and relatives on the battlefield, was at once overwhelmed by compassion for them who had so decided to fight amongst themselves. As far as his soldiers were concerned, he was sympathetic from the beginning, but he felt compassion even for the soldiers of the opposite party, foreseeing their imminent death. . . . He was more or less astonished to see their fighting spirit. Practically the whole community, all blood relatives of Arjuna, had come to fight with him. This overwhelmed a kind devotee like Arjuna. Although it is not mentioned here, still one can easily imagine that not only were



## Vaiṣṇava Compassion

Arjuna's bodily limbs quivering and his mouth drying up, but he was also crying out of compassion. Such symptoms in Arjuna were not due to weakness but to his softheartedness, a characteristic of a pure devotee of the Lord.

—Bg. 1.28, purport

Later, Prabhupāda states that “such a kind and softhearted person, in the devotional service of the Lord, is fit to receive self-knowledge.” (Bg. 1.46, purport)

In the next chapter, however, Śrīla Prabhupāda calls Arjuna's compassion mundane. “Sañjaya said: Seeing Arjuna full of compassion, his mind depressed, his eyes full of tears, Madhusūdana, Kṛṣṇa, spoke the following words.” (Bg. 2.1)

From the purport:

Material compassion, lamentation and tears are all signs of ignorance of the real self. Compassion for the eternal soul is self-realization. The word “Madhusūdana” is significant in this verse. Lord Kṛṣṇa killed the demon Madhu, and now Arjuna wanted Kṛṣṇa to kill the demon of misunderstanding that had overtaken him in the discharge of his duty. No one knows where compassion should be applied. Compassion for the dress of a drowning man is senseless. A man fallen in the ocean of nescience cannot be saved simply by rescuing his outward dress—the gross material body. One who does not know this and laments for the outward dress is called a *śūdra*, or one who laments unnecessarily. Arjuna was a *kṣatriya*, and this conduct was not expected from him. Lord Kṛṣṇa, however, can dissipate the lamentation of the ignorant man, and for this purpose the *Bhagavad-gītā* was sung by Him.

Over the years, these types of comments have led devotees to examine carefully whether they are acting out of spiritual realization or a sense of mundane compassion. If Arjuna, seeing his relatives and teachers lined up before him on the battlefield, was judged to have mundane compassion and therefore corrected by Kṛṣṇa with stern words (“My dear Arjuna, how have these impurities come upon you? They are not at all befitting a man who knows the value of life. They lead not to higher planets but to infamy. O son



of Prthā, do not yield to this degrading impotence. It does not become you. Give up such petty weakness of heart and arise, O chastiser of the enemy.”), what about our own feelings toward others and our own attempts to simply be kind? Sometimes we have so carefully examined our motives and tried to come out acting on the spiritual plane that we have acted beyond our realization and given up common courtesy. How many of us have felt that our needs or desires are more important than the needs or desires of others simply because we are devotees? How many of us have even felt that in relation to other devotees?

This makes me think of something that is a half-joke in ISKCON but which I think illustrates the dichotomy. That is, the length of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class. Here’s the scenario: A well-known *sannyāsī* arrives at the temple and is asked to give class. Ten minutes after the class has usually ended he asks, “How long does the class last here?”

“Uh, Mahārāja, we usually end class ten minutes ago. The devotees have to get to their breakfast.”

He jokes, “Well, we’ll concede to the hungry bellies of the devotees.” But it’s obvious he’s reluctant to leave the podium. “There’s a lot more nectar I could tell you about Lord Caitanya’s pastimes . . .” And often he speaks for another ten or twenty minutes.

The joke part comes in when we call a lecturer compassionate for speaking only forty minutes. After all, he could have spoken for three hours. We laugh at that because we have been taught to think of a lofty ideal. Mahārāja Parikṣit, for example, sat hearing *Bhāgavatam* for seven days. During that time, he neither ate, drank, nor slept—so great was his taste for hearing *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. Yet we can barely sit for an hour. Some people blame that on themselves, others blame it on the quality of the speaker, but whatever the reason, it is obvious that we are neither Mahārāja Parikṣit nor Śukadeva Gosvāmī.

So, is it mundane compassion to consider the devotees who have to sit through our two- or three-hour class? Perhaps their bodies hurt or the room is too warm. Perhaps breakfast time has come and gone and they are simply hungry, or maybe they have other services to which they must attend. Should we override those complaints and speak on and on with the hope of elevating us all to a higher platform? Is that a more spiritual choice? This sounds like a humorous question, but it’s not really. Rather,



it's an example of how we may become carried away by ideals we have not yet achieved.

I can think of another half-joke to illustrate this point. When I was at a devotee's house in Trinidad some time ago, I saw a button that said, "Do someone a favor today: mind your own business." The more I thought about it, the more I realized that not meddling in someone else's life is a form of compassion. If we can avoid judging others by our own standards, and more importantly, avoid trying to manipulate them into doing what we want them to do—even in the name of caring for them—then that is compassion. It takes humility not to be intrusive. Humility, along with kindness and courtesy, is a quality that helps us develop true compassion. Someone who minds their own business may sometimes appear indifferent, which is the opposite of compassionate, but it's actually a kindness to allow people to live their own lives, to develop their own relationships with Kṛṣṇa, and to pursue their own service offerings. If we are humble and respectful toward others in that sense, we will also be in a better position to actually help others, should they need our help.

Thomas Merton called those who don't avoid the urge to judge and control others "religious busybodies." How that translates in an institution is that people present themselves as representatives of God and then require other people to follow them, regardless of the followers' individuality. This is not only presumptuous, but it is uncompassionate in the way it does not allow others to express themselves in ways that are meaningful to themselves. Living in a religious institution requires following the authorities, surrendering to guru, and cooperating with temple managers. A religious busybody is either a self-appointed authority or caregiver or an actual authority who has overstepped his jurisdiction over a devotee's life.

Merton abhorred the many religious busybodies he saw in his own religious institution, and he thought it unnecessary to manage people's souls to the degree that many religious busybodies try to do. There is a point where caregiving is compassionate and important, but like anything, there is a line which even a caregiver should not cross.

Institutions do not generally encourage their members to use their own discrimination in deciding who to follow or to maintain a deep sense of individuality, because individuality is often seen as working against the spirit of cooperation. It seems necessary, however, and compassionate, to



allow individuality to develop. In the long run, such individuality provides a society with strength, because strong individuals build a strong society. Aside from that, devotional service and the ability to go back to Godhead are also individual pursuits and attainments. We cannot achieve them simply by membership in an institution.

In my opinion, the development of strong individuality is not at odds with the need for devotees to cooperate. If devotees feel the personal responsibility to take care of themselves, of their *sādhana*, and of their relationship with Kṛṣṇa, they will automatically aspire to fulfill Prabhupāda's edict that we should cooperate to push on the preaching. From their base of self-responsibility, they will be able to serve the community. But no, they will not be so subject to the manipulation of others. Their relationship with authorities will come down to the authorities helping such persons find themselves and then to act strongly in cooperation with the preaching effort.

Is cooperation possible if people are too self-directed? When devotees have many people in their lives defining who they are and what is expected of them, and also both defining Kṛṣṇa consciousness for them and telling them how to live according to that definition—telling them how to follow their spiritual master, defining the guru's mood, etc.—they may wonder where their own relationship with the spiritual master lies. They may not take personal responsibility for it. It is therefore an act of compassion to allow people to find themselves and to express that in their spiritual lives.

There is also something potentially dangerous about trying to manipulate others in the name of protecting them from themselves. Or to think, "I am Kṛṣṇa's representative. I know what's best for everyone else. I know you rascals, I know you simply want to go off to the beach on this sunny day, or to laze around and watch television, but I'm going to make you sit and listen to the *Bhāgavatam*. This is good for you. The more I go on, the more I talk about Kṛṣṇa, the more you will be benefited." There is a great risk in assuming we can read devotees' minds and motivations. Presumption and pride may lead us to act on misplaced compassion.

Then, what does it mean for a devotee to show compassion toward other devotees, or even the nondevotees? Is trying to offer assistance always presumptuous?



Those who hear about or witness others suffering naturally want to help. Devotees will mostly want to help spiritually, because they know that material aid has a limited effect. But it is possible to be presumptuous about how much we are actually helping. It's also easy to presume that we have achieved an understanding of spiritual compassion and how to offer it greater than what we actually have. Our sympathy often doesn't run as deeply as we wish it would, and our motivation to be kind is often somewhat superficial. Therefore, it's possible that our compassionate act could be misplaced. We often help with an air of superiority—"At least this isn't happening to *me!*"—which reduces our ability to really care. This is something we must overcome if we wish to offer actual compassion to another that moves beyond presumption.

Presumption is based on false prestige. Lord Kapiladeva tells us that the living entity becomes entangled in karma due to his false sense of self. Therefore, Vaiṣṇavas try to cultivate humility. If we want to show compassion, we must be careful not to have the pride that we are great compassionate workers, that we are doing so much to aid suffering humanity. Rather, we should work on behalf of the compassionate worker, Śrīla Prabhupāda.

By diving into the preaching movement, devotees can go a long way toward breaking through their own hardheartedness. When we preach, we immediately show compassion according to the spiritual master's direction and learn to sacrifice our own comforts for the well-being of others. Preaching is important; otherwise, our sense of spiritual compassion would remain theoretical. Still, there is a distance to move from the theoretical to the realized, and to get there we need to cultivate humility and self-awareness—to see how much we too are suffering and in how many similar ways, how much we have been given by our spiritual master, and how very vulnerable we are—before we can truly hear or understand what others are going through.

It would seem that it is possible to do an inferior job of showing compassion. I mean, compassion is a feeling and not a mechanical act. If our consciousness is not good and we lack expertise, we fall easily into presumption. Giving someone else Kṛṣṇa consciousness, whether devotee or nondevotee, is a sublime act. To give Kṛṣṇa consciousness is way above any physical help we can offer, but it is possible for those who do not feel any genuine empathy to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness without care. We may do it



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mechanically, simply because our guru told us we should. That alone makes our compassionate expressions inferior and presumptuous. As devotees, we should strive to give the one before the zeroes without ignoring the importance of the zeroes to others. That combination is our goal. A truly caring devotee who wants to help others doesn't see their needs as wholly material, but uses them to deliver the best thing. Without the willingness to face others as complete human beings, how will we ever know them enough to convey the ultimate compassion, the gift of *kṛṣṇa-nāma*?

When we speak about compassion, however, we are not speaking about humanism. The dictionary defines *humanism* as "any system of thought or action in which human interests, values, and dignity predominate, esp. an ethical theory that often rejects the importance of a belief in God." When I first began to discuss this topic with devotees, they were frank about their interest in it: they were interested in discussing compassion among devotees, and they saw compassion not only as *preaching* to devotees ("spiritual compassion") but as helping out in very practical, so-called material ways. Around this time, I also received a letter from a Godbrother who had heard I was writing a book on compassion. He was concerned that the book not rubber-stamp humanism in the name of compassion. He said that there is a trend among devotees to acknowledge what we have called mundane compassion in this movement as more important than spiritual growth. He said as a movement, we are allowing the importance of acknowledging feelings, whether or not they are Kṛṣṇa conscious, to overrule the standards Śrīla Prabhupāda established. We are allowing sentiment to overrule philosophy. He gave the example of some devotees he knew who were using the temple room to hold parties and disco dances, not, of course, centered on the Deity, but in order to develop a more cohesive social life among themselves. He felt that a cohesive social life is important in the devotee community, but at least in this particular example, the devotees were going about it in a mundane and frivolous way. They were calling this frivolity "becoming more human with one another" or "becoming compassionate toward ourselves as people." My Godbrother did not agree that such behavior could be labeled "compassionate." He said it sounded more like they were indulging in sense gratification.



I agree. There *is* such a thing as mundane or misplaced compassion, and we should not be guilty of indulging in it. At the same time, we do need to give attention to the whole person and not, fanatically, concentrate only on the soul, hammering away at the philosophy or trying to manipulate someone into doing “what is best for them.” If someone needs help starting their car, we should care enough to help. If a mother is struggling with her children, we should care enough to help. At the same time, we should not act in a way that diminishes anyone’s Kṛṣṇa consciousness or allows them to relax their own spiritual focus to such an extent that they are no longer moving forward. Prabhupāda defined such behavior as violence.

*Abimsā*, nonviolence, means that one should not do anything which will put others into misery or confusion. Material activities that are promised by so many politicians, sociologists, philanthropists, etc., do not produce very good results because the politicians and philanthropists have no transcendental vision; they do not know what is actually beneficial for human society. *Abimsā* means that people should be trained in such a way that the full utilization of the human body can be achieved. The human body is meant for spiritual realization, so any movement or any commissions which do not further that end commit violence on the human body. That which furthers the future spiritual happiness of the people in general is called nonviolence.

—Bg. 10.4–5, purport

Still, there has to be a balance. A compassionate preacher has to help others find the strength within to acknowledge their physical and emotional needs, to recognize their propensities, and to want to use those things in Kṛṣṇa’s service. Sooner or later, each of us will have to face the fact that we have certain tendencies. If we want to really become devotees, we will need to learn how to engage them for Kṛṣṇa’s pleasure. To stop that process in the name of helping others is a great presumption on a preacher’s part. Sometimes that search resembles a descent into sense gratification—sometimes it *is* a descent into sense gratification—and a self-aware preacher will be kind during this time and try to help devotees find themselves.

We have many opportunities to practice kindness and consideration as well as to cultivate our inner, spiritual awareness. By helping others in their



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ordinary lives without losing sight of the spiritual goal, we can become eligible to learn how to express the deepest forms of compassion. To say that we should never give material compassion *without* also giving spiritual compassion is valid; but a spiritualist should not ignore the wholeness of another person when considering their well-being. We should care for others both materially and spiritually, just as we care for ourselves. To ignore others' needs in the name of offering only spiritual compassion means to live in denial about our own humanness.

# *Reaping the Fruits and Learning to Live With Them*

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**K**RṢṆA CONSCIOUS PREACHING, most of us have discovered, means more than meeting a nondevotee long enough to sell him or her a book. Selling books is certainly a high form of devotional compassion, and there is Śrīla Prabhupāda's famous statement: "What your one-minute speech will do?" The books, he assured us, were time bombs; they would go off at exactly the right time.

But then what? As much as we need to preach to nondevotees, we need to preach to those who arrive at our doorstep, hoping to begin their spiritual lives. This is the moment when we reap the fruits of our preaching. Therefore, when we speak of Kṛṣṇa conscious compassion, we must also discuss the vocation of counseling and caring for devotees.

In the past, ISKCON was not so compassionate toward devotees, often rejecting them for their weaknesses or not accepting their desires to serve in more individualized ways. Institutions in general are often rigid, formalized, and they find it difficult to give room to those who need to express themselves in ways beyond the mainstream. This rigidity leads people to think of institutions as oppressive and uncompassionate, and often they are right.

In the sense that we have not cared for our devotees, it can be said that we have not cared for the nondevotees either. That is, we haven't made it easy for them to take to spiritual life, because we haven't provided a friendly environment in which they can do so.

To the extent that we can see that, we can also come to appreciate the depth of Śrīla Prabhupāda's compassion: he was willing to embrace any variety of persons, seeing them all as souls with the potential to serve Kṛṣṇa. Compassion is a liberal quality.

It is not within the scope of this book to present a treatise on ISKCON's ills and how we should remedy them. Still, there are some general points that can be made. The first is that we should be careful not to judge others. When we do avoid judging others, it's usually because we are



prepared to hear from them why they are doing the things they are doing. Avoiding judgment does not mean failing to give guidance or support when necessary; it simply means we give up our self-righteousness. To give up self-righteousness, we have to be most interested in personal reform. In one of his lectures, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura stated:

The world is in no need of any reformer. The world has a very competent person for guiding its minutest happenings. The person who finds that there is scope for reform of the world himself stands in need of reform. The world goes on in its own perfect way. No person can deflect it by the breadth of a hair from the course chalked out for it by providence. . . . What is necessary is to change our outlook to this very world. . . . The scriptures declare that it is only necessary to listen with an open mind to the name of Kṛṣṇa from the lips of a bona fide devotee. As soon as Kṛṣṇa enters the listening ear, He clears up the vision of the listener so that he no longer has any ambition of ever-acting the part of a reformer of any other person, because he finds that nobody is left without the very highest guidance. It is therefore his own reform by the grace of God, whose supreme necessity and nature he is increasingly able to realize by the eternally continuing mercy of the Supreme Lord.

Giving up self-righteousness, however, does not mean that we should rubber-stamp lower standards. It means facing the standards, our imperfect ability to follow them, and responding with humility. As we devotees try to find our balance between personhood and institutional life, ISKCON has become rife with humanistic sub-movements, many of which do advocate lowering the standards of behavior Śrīla Prabhupāda set for us.

What we choose not to judge is something else. When devotees first come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, it is often necessary for them to accept the practices rigidly, almost fanatically, in order to make them part of their lives. As they advance in spiritual life, however, it begins to feel authentic to relax not their practices but their rigid application of them. This is a delicate and individual stage in a devotee's life, and therefore we shouldn't universally condemn, for example, all the devotees who don't attend *maṅgala-ārati* every day or who have relaxed some other such standard in their search for a deeper spiritual life.



In my role as spiritual guide, I find I often have to relate to devotees who are seeking a more authentic self in their spiritual practices. I find that I cannot push such devotees in a dogmatic or heavy-handed way. In fact, I find that in most cases, they do discover their personal offerings to Kṛṣṇa, and then go on to live in Kṛṣṇa consciousness with far less pretension. These devotees do not abandon the basics of hearing, chanting, and following the regulative principles, but they find something essential in those practices and make them personal to their lives.

When devotees speak about this topic, it is inevitable that we do have to face the question of how what we have identified as standards in Kṛṣṇa consciousness will be maintained. How can we simultaneously maintain temple and other spiritual standards while allowing devotees to find their own volition in surrendering to Kṛṣṇa?

I think it is important for all devotees to associate with serious practitioners and to keep close contact with their spiritual masters, who are both following the standards and who understand what they are trying to do. We all need encouragement and guidance if we want to remain attached to the lifeline Śrīla Prabhupāda has thrown us. But if we are going to remain devotees over the long haul—until death—we are each going to have to find a way to practice devotional service that is congenial to ourselves. That is probably the biggest service we can offer the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement—to remain healthy, balanced devotees in touch with ourselves. Therefore, it's good not to take on more than we can actually do. As one priest put it, "Don't pray as you can't, pray as you can." We each have to be willing to make that much sacrifice: to do whatever it takes to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Never call sense gratification "self-realization," and don't cheat yourself. Be an authentic devotee.

An institution, of course, feels the weight to maintain what the founder has given, but that weight sits equally on each of our shoulders. We have to each face our own level of sincerity and work to increase it. The institution is only meant to bring similarly sincere, like-minded souls together. We have to learn to trust both ourselves and our fellow devotees.

But trust always comes hard. We usually live on the edge of uncertainty. Is what we are doing the most we could be doing for Kṛṣṇa? Are we offering enough? Being enough? Often, to discover the answer to that question, we have to be willing to explore. By taking personal risks and



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seeing that we have deepened our Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we learn to trust ourselves bit by bit. We can also see where we are going wrong.

Ultimately, devotional service is voluntary. In the *vaidhi* stage, our willingness to serve is balanced by discipline. Gradually, the guru's discipline becomes self-discipline, and thus we become trained. But we cannot deny that at every step, devotional service is voluntary. Therefore, we must learn to face our choices daily. Those who have accepted initiation have chosen a guru; if we follow Prabhupāda, we have also chosen a worshipable Deity, Lord Kṛṣṇa. Such choices, however, are not made once and for all. We must continue to choose every day. Sometimes institutions emphasize too much that we *must* do certain things, accept certain principles, and become certain kinds of people, and forget that surrender is an act of volition. If we are not making a daily, conscious choice to surrender in spiritual life, we will very quickly become mechanical and dissatisfied. Such dissatisfaction eventually will cause a crisis in our spiritual lives.

So we should be compassionate toward people who are learning to choose Kṛṣṇa consciousness in a very personal way. If we see someone doing something we wouldn't do, we should be careful not to condemn that person. If someone is lowering a standard, we should try to understand why he or she is doing it—the heart behind the decision. What have we each been through, and how are we responding to our experiences? Showing compassion does not mean condoning *māyā*, but it requires that we try to understand another devotee's experience. It also means we learn to forgive ourselves and others. It means recognizing whatever sincerity is present in the hearts of others. If we as an institution are capable of exchanging on an ecumenical level with those outside our movement, if we are willing and able to see the good in their attempts to practice God consciousness, we should at least be willing to extend the same courtesy to our own members while we work to maintain the devotional standards Śrīla Prabhupāda set.

While writing this book, I met Śācīnandana Swami in Italy. When I mentioned that I was writing about being compassionate toward devotees' search for the authentic devotional self, he made the following comment in a letter to me:



My eating, acting, and thinking should be done in Kṛṣṇa conscious ways, which are satisfying the needs I feel on these levels as well as connected with my spiritual, unconditional existence, as part of Kṛṣṇa. This area where one tries to shine the light of Kṛṣṇa consciousness into the conditioned platform is an area which is very important. It is an area where a lot of individuality can express itself. It is an area where a lot of responsibility needs to be taken by the individual, and it is an area where sometimes mistakes will be made. One learns from these mistakes if one has a serious motivation, and one becomes addicted to repeat the same mistake again and again if one is not yet so spiritually developed.

I appreciated his comment, especially his point that if we are sincere, we may explore to find ourselves, but we will not repeat the same mistake again and again.

The most important point in this discussion is that despite changes both in ourselves and in ISKCON, we should retain the anchor of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Only a foolish person will give up chanting and hearing in the name of self-exploration.

Rebellion against ISKCON is another pit into which a number of devotees fall. As we mature in spiritual life, we actually lose our cynicism toward ISKCON, because we no longer mistake the institution for Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda established ISKCON, and he seemed to have bright hopes that everything could be taken care of by living within it and following the rules and regulations. One could say that ISKCON is a faded utopia, or even that the movement has grown in such a direction as to require most devotees to pursue their Kṛṣṇa consciousness outside the original framework. But if we are chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and serving Śrīla Prabhupāda, we are not outside Lord Caitanya's gift, the kind of Kṛṣṇa consciousness that we can take with us everywhere. It is a moveable feast.

Although devotees are able to separate Kṛṣṇa from ISKCON, however, they are not always able to separate Prabhupāda from ISKCON. Śrīla Prabhupāda is more than this institution, and he cannot be left frozen in 1977. Life has gone on, and our institution has grown and changed. We do not need to interpret Prabhupāda now, but we do have to apply his teachings to the times that are with us. As we learn to do that, we learn to live



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with Prabhupāda, pray to Prabhupāda, beg Prabhupāda for his mercy and guidance, and feel Prabhupāda's compassion toward us. We will learn to see how Prabhupāda is responding to us now.

I thought about this point when I received a letter from someone accusing me of not doing what Prabhupāda said. He said he had a letter that proved his statement. But I can only respond, "You may say that, but *my* Prabhupāda is very kind to me. I know that. I am still in touch with him."

If we learn to live with Prabhupāda in the present, we can be confident that as our hearts become purified, he will speak to us—not only through the institution, but directly. Some devotees point out that this means we have lost the simplicity we had in those early days, but I feel that as we gain confidence in our current relationship with Prabhupāda, despite the loss we will better serve the institution. We cannot stay children forever.

Therefore, we can say that Śrīla Prabhupāda was compassionate enough to create an institution not only to sell his books but in which we can offer many kinds of services. It is up to us to mature and cooperate out of love for him. His request that we do this has ensured the continued advancement of those who take that order to heart.





## 2

### *Ahimsā*

Such *ahimsā* is not a religious principle itself, but it is an important quality for persons who are actually religious. It is a common sense religion because one is advised to do no harm to any other animal or living being because such harmful actions are equally harmful to he who does the harm. But before learning these principles of nonviolence one has to learn two other principles, namely to be humble and to be prideless. Unless one is humble and prideless, one cannot be harmless and nonviolent. And after being nonviolent one has to learn tolerance and simplicity of living. One must offer respects to the great religious preachers and spiritual leaders and also train the senses for controlled action, learning to be unattached to family and home, and enacting devotional service to the Lord, etc. At the ultimate stage one has to accept the Lord and become His devotee; otherwise there is no religion. In religious principles there must be God in the center; otherwise simple moral instructions are merely subreligious principles, generally known as *upadharma*, or nearness to religious principles.

—*Bhāg.* 2.7.37, purport





## Above All, Do No Harm

It is said here that the cows used to moisten the pasturing land with milk because their milk bags were fatty and the animals were joyful. Do they not require, therefore, proper protection for a joyful life by being fed with a sufficient quantity of grass in the field? Why should men kill cows for their selfish purposes? Why should man not be satisfied with grains, fruits and milk, which, combined together, can produce hundreds and thousands of palatable dishes? Why are there slaughterhouses all over the world to kill innocent animals? . . . Should not a king or executive head protect the lives of the poor animals who are unable to defend themselves? Is this humanity? Are not the animals of a country citizens also? Then why are they allowed to be butchered in organized slaughterhouses? Are these the signs of equality, fraternity and nonviolence?

—*Bhāg.* 1.10.4, purport

**A**HIMŚĀ MEANS MORE THAN SIMPLY NOT HARMING other living entities; to practice true *ahimsā*, we must give others spiritual knowledge. Before approaching that broader definition, however, I would like to discuss the importance of the simpler definition applied by most people. That is, that we should not hurt other creatures. Śrīla Prabhupāda certainly gave this definition credit, and we saw in his personal behavior how he didn't even like insects to be killed.

Although Prabhupāda said we should not hurt any creature, he often spoke about violence toward the cow. In his preaching, he always said that cows were valuable to human society because they produce milk, which nourishes us. He would also say that because we drink her milk, the cow is our mother. It is sinful to kill our mother.

Prabhupāda also linked animal-killing to the presence of war and pestilence in human society. The modern phenomenon of opening slaughterhouses to kill millions of cows and other animals every year, he insisted, would wreak havoc in the societies that supported them. Slaughterhouses create a kind of collective karma for humankind. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:



To be nonviolent to human beings and to be a killer or enemy of the poor animals is Satan's philosophy. In this age there is enmity toward poor animals, and therefore the poor creatures are always anxious. The reaction of the poor animals is being forced on human society, and therefore there is always the strain of cold or hot war between men, individually, collectively or nationally.

—*Bhāg.* 1.10.6, purport

Kṛṣṇa seems to also feel strongly about wanton violence—so strongly, that He appeared as Lord Buddha. Before Lord Buddha's appearance, people had become so degraded that they were using Vedic sacrifice as an excuse to slaughter animals. Lord Buddha decried the *Vedas* in order to stop the sacrifices, then preached about the negative psychological effects killing animals causes. By practicing nonviolence under Lord Buddha's instructions, the atheists were able to begin spiritual life. His rejection of the *Vedas* was a temporary measure meant to elevate those to whom he was preaching; still, he is praised for his compassion in wanting to save the animals.

Inevitably, when nonviolence is discussed, the question of whether true nonviolence is possible is raised. In his teachings, Śrīla Prabhupāda criticizes unnecessary violence. It is not possible in this world to be completely non-violent. This world is designed so that one creature must live at the expense of another. Every time we inhale, we kill millions of microbes. When we walk, we kill endless small insects. There is no way to avoid such killing. But we can avoid unnecessary killing; we can keep violence at a minimum.

*Abimśā* means not arresting the progressive life of any living entity. One should not think that since the spirit spark is never killed even after the killing of the body there is no harm in killing animals for sense gratification. People are now addicted to eating animals, in spite of having an ample supply of grains, fruits and milk. There is no necessity for animal killing. This injunction is for everyone. When there is no alternative, one may kill an animal, but it should be offered in sacrifice. At any rate, when there is an ample food supply for humanity, persons who are desiring to make advancement in spiritual realization should not commit violence to animals. Real *abimśā* means not checking anyone's progressive life. The animals are also making progress in their evolutionary life by transmigrating from one category of animal



## *Ahiṃsā*

life to another. If a particular animal is killed, then his progress is checked. If an animal is staying in a particular body for so many days or so many years and is untimely killed, then he has to come back again in that form of life to complete the remaining days in order to be promoted to another species of life. So their progress should not be checked simply to satisfy one's palate. This is called *ahiṃsā*.

—Bg. 16.1–3

# Conscientious Nonviolence in a Violent World

AS DEVOTEES, WE ALREADY DO NOT EAT MEAT, do not hunt for sport, and generally try to avoid committing violence against other creatures. But there are acts of violence we cannot avoid. Every time we eat even a vegetarian meal, we have harmed living creatures, either taking their lives or divesting them of parts of their bodies. The only thing that can give us solace is if we offer what we take from the world in sacrifice. The *Bhagavad-gītā* tells us, "Work done as a sacrifice for Viṣṇu must be performed, otherwise work causes bondage in this material world. Therefore, O son of Kuntī, perform your prescribed duties for His satisfaction, and in that way you will always remain free from bondage." (Bg. 3.9) In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that we must all work to maintain our bodies. Working in this world—which includes providing ourselves and our families with food—will force us to commit violence. Whatever we do, therefore, should be done in sacrifice to Viṣṇu. "Therefore, one has to work in Kṛṣṇa consciousness to satisfy Kṛṣṇa (or Viṣṇu); and while performing such activities one is in a liberated stage. This is the great art of doing work. . . . Nothing should be performed for sense gratification, but everything should be done for the satisfaction of Kṛṣṇa. This practice will not only save one from the reaction of work, but also gradually elevate one to transcendental loving service of the Lord, which alone can raise one to the kingdom of God."

Practically, this means keeping both violence at a minimum by not taking (or doing) more than required, eating sparingly, and offering all of one's energy and efforts to Kṛṣṇa. Otherwise, Prabhupāda said, even a tree should not be cut; we should not dare to commit such violence.

Of the Gosvāmīs it is said, *lokānām hita-kāriṇau tri-bhuvane mānyau*. Because they were benefactors for all kinds of living entity, therefore they were honored *tri-bhuvane*, in three worlds. . . . A *sādhū's* business is for the benefit of all living entities. A *sādhū* does not like to cut even



a tree, because he knows, “Here is a living entity. He is standing here for many years by his karma, and he has to continue this for many years more. So he cannot avoid this because it is nature’s law.” . . . by cutting the body . . . we check the continuation of his period, therefore we become sinful. You cannot cut even a tree without Kṛṣṇa’s purpose. Without Kṛṣṇa’s purpose we cannot kill even an ant, we cannot cut even a tree, then we shall be liable to punishment.

—Lecture by Śrīla Prabhupāda, April 19, 1973

In the old days of the movement, devotees took this injunction to heart, and thought that if they hit an animal while driving in their *saṅkīrtana* van, the animal would go back to Godhead. Śrīla Prabhupāda did not make light of even accidental violence. Hari Śauri Prabhu tells one story where he had flicked a mosquito away from Prabhupāda, and Prabhupāda had thought he had killed it. Prabhupāda said, “Oh, you should not have done that.” As they watched, however, they saw that the mosquito was still moving. “Oh, Hare Kṛṣṇa!” Prabhupāda exclaimed, relieved to find the creature still alive.

Another time, Prabhupāda was pleased to see a young disciple gently removing an ant from his desk. He smiled and said, “Before you would have killed it.”

In Dallas, when we decided to cut down a tree we felt posed a threat to a building, Śrīla Prabhupāda was angry. The tree had half fallen in a violent windstorm just a few months before Śrīla Prabhupāda’s first visit to Dallas. When we cut it down, it had been resting on the children’s *prasādam* hall. The tree was still rooted, but its dangling branches left almost no room for us to move along the walkway. I was the temple president at that time, and at first, I didn’t worry about the tree, but different devotees told me I should have the tree cut down. They were afraid it would crash through the *prasādam* hall roof. When I agreed, one of the devotees climbed the tree with a power saw and dismantled its upper branches and trunk. In the end, nothing remained but the lower ten feet of tilted trunk.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda came that September, he saw the remains of the tree and he looked troubled. He walked off the cement path and went up to the tree, his entourage of leaders, temple devotees, and *gurukula* children following.

“Who has done this?” he demanded. I told him I had, and I told him why. But Prabhupāda was angry. “That was no reason to kill it,” he told me. When I tried to say that the fallen tree probably would have died soon anyway, he said, “No, it is not dead. Look. There is a green twig growing out of it.”

We were all shocked at what we now understood was a brutal, unnecessary act. Later in his room, Prabhupāda continued to criticize the killing of the tree. He said our thoughtlessness was a typical American attitude: when something is wrong, cut it down and destroy it—with no understanding or compassion for the soul.

From these and other examples, we can understand that the pure devotee is compassionate toward other living entities and does not commit unnecessary violence even in the name of being on Kṛṣṇa’s mission. Rather, he regrets the necessary violence, but offers everything he does and eats to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa both protects the devotee from any sinful reaction and blesses the soul who suffered during the offering.



# Real Nonviolence

*Ahimsā*, nonviolence, means that one should not do anything which will put others into misery or confusion. Material activities that are promised by so many politicians, sociologists, philanthropists, etc., do not produce very good results because the politicians and philanthropists have no transcendental vision; they do not know what is actually beneficial for human society. *Ahimsā* means that people should be trained in such a way that the full utilization of the human body can be achieved. The human body is meant for spiritual realization, so any movement or any commissions which do not further that end commit violence on the human body. That which furthers the future spiritual happiness of the people in general is called nonviolence.

—Bg. 10.4-5, purport

I HAVE ALWAYS LIKED THIS DEFINITION OF NONVIOLENCE: the failure to give others Kṛṣṇa consciousness is violence. To practice this degree of nonviolence requires that we learn to see each living entity, regardless of the body it inhabits, as spirit soul no different in quality than ourselves. In one talk, Śrīla Prabhupāda connects our responsibility to be nonviolent to the idea that each living entity has rights. He speaks about abortion—that it has been arranged by karma in which womb a living entity will take birth. If we prevent the soul from accepting the body by aborting the fetus, then that is like denying someone his legal right to occupy an apartment for which he has already paid the rent. Such behavior is criminal. Similarly, to not help a person attain the spirit soul's right to understand God and his own relationship with Him is violent. More than violent, it's criminal.

There's an anecdote I once heard from Prabhupāda about when he was still a householder. He said he had been invited to speak at Jhansi on a holiday declared to honor Gandhi. He was assigned the topic of nonviolence. He defined violence as preventing someone from gaining something which rightfully belongs to them. By having taken birth in the land of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and Vyāsa, he said, the people of India have a right to take



to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If someone is preventing them in any way, that person is committing violence. He went on to say that the Indian government was violent because it was preventing people from gaining their true birthright.

How can we understand the principle that each living entity is a spirit soul, and feel the urge to give it Kṛṣṇa consciousness? Prabhupāda uses clear and simple logic to convince us of the soul's presence in each type of body: when we cut an animal, it cries; if we force it into a corner, it will become angry. All living beings, regardless of what body they inhabit, show the symptoms of life that prove that they are souls. In his conversation with Cardinal Danielou, printed in *The Science of Self-Realization*, Śrīla Prabhupāda considered foolish the idea that because man is made in the image of God, only humans have souls and are therefore sacred:

That is foolishness. First of all, we have to understand the evidence of the soul's presence within the body. Then we can see whether the human being has a soul and the cow does not. What are the different characteristics of the cow and the man? If we find a difference in characteristics, then we can say that in the animal there is no soul. But if we see that the animal and the human being have the same characteristics, then how can you say that the animal has no soul? The general symptoms are that the animal eats, you eat; the animal sleeps, you sleep; the animal mates, you mate; the animal defends, and you defend. Where is the difference? . . .

Our *Bhagavad-gītā* says *sarva-yoniṣu*, "In all species of life the soul exists." The body is like a suit of clothes. You have black clothes; I am dressed in saffron clothes. But within the dress you are a human being, and I am also a human being. Similarly, the bodies of the different species are just like different types of dress. There are soul, a part and parcel of God. . . . That difference is due to the development of consciousness. In the human body there is developed consciousness. Even a tree has a soul, but a tree's consciousness is not very developed. If you cut a tree it does not resist. Actually, it does resist, but only to a very small degree. There is a scientist named Jagadish Chandra Bose who has made a machine which shows that trees and plants are able to feel pain when they are cut. And we can see directly that when someone



comes to kill an animal, it resists, it cries, it makes a horrible sound. So it is a matter of the development of consciousness. But the soul is there within all living beings.

—SSR, Chapter 4, pp. 123–24

Later in the discussion, the Cardinal insisted that because animals do not have the intelligence to inquire into metaphysics or transcendence, that is the proof that they do not have souls. Śrīla Prabhupāda called that ridiculous. Children do not have that intelligence either. Does that mean that children have no souls?

After understanding that all living entities are souls with the inborn right to know Kṛṣṇa, a devotee's natural compassion will be awakened when he actually sees these souls suffering in material life rather than living out their birthright. Not only will we refrain from killing other creatures, we will try in some way to give them Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Devotees often wonder how, then, to share Kṛṣṇa consciousness with those who do not wish to receive it, or those souls who have appeared in the lower species. Nonviolence is active, not inactive. It's the action of seeing that people can fulfill their right to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This returns us to the importance of preaching as an expression of compassion. Prabhupāda's statement has such force: unless we preach, we are committing violence.

It also returns us to the point that preaching cannot be done in one single way. We must be creative, especially when approaching persons and other living entities who do not have a natural interest in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Of course, *prasādam* distribution, Prabhupāda said, is our greatest weapon. *Prasādam* and the holy names are all we can offer souls in the lower species, but they are effective on humans who are uninterested in spiritual life too. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

The spiritual master encourages distribution of *prasādam* . . . to the public. Ours is not a dry philosophy—simply talk and go away. No. We distribute . . . very sumptuous *prasādam*. . . *prasādam* distribution is another symptom of the genuine spiritual master.

If you eat *bhagavat-prasādam*, then gradually you become spiritualized; it has this potency. Therefore it is said that realization of God



begins with the tongue. . . . If you engage your tongue in the service of the Lord, then you realize God. . . . If you just sincerely engage your tongue in the service of the Lord, you will realize Him. It is so simple.

—*The Journey of Self-Discovery*, p. 123

Ultimately, we must ourselves be thinking of Kṛṣṇa in order to always want to give Kṛṣṇa to others in one form or another. Most people we will find have no natural interest in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Because of that, we shouldn't harden our hearts toward such persons and ignore them. Śrīla Prabhupāda took so many risks as a preacher, and we too may take risks, perhaps entering arenas we have never entered before. I think of the scientists at the Bhaktivedanta Institute who have managed to infiltrate a world that is primarily atheistic. Devotees may also align themselves with organizations that promulgate nonviolence—animal protection or nature conservancy groups—not simply to protect the environment, but to help persons interested in the preliminary qualities of spiritual life to go further. Lord Caitanya was indiscriminate when distributing His mercy; He did not stop to think whether someone was a fit candidate or not. Similarly, Śrīla Prabhupāda was willing to give any spirit soul the chance to develop love of God. He recognized the right of each individual soul to live according to his constitutional position as servant of God, and although he also knew that only a rare soul would even be interested (*manuṣyāṇāṁ sabasreṣu kaścid yatati siddhaye/ yatatām api siddhānāṁ kaścin mām vetti tattvataḥ*), he always encouraged his disciples to preach as widely as possible.

Prabhupāda also recognized the principle of *ajñāta-sukṛti*, by which those who even contact a devotee and who render some favorable service, even unknowingly, would receive benefit.

. . . *ajñāta-sukṛti* . . . refer[s] to pious activities performed without the actor's knowledge. But these are also planned. For example, Kṛṣṇa comes like an ordinary human being, He comes as a devotee like Lord Caitanya, or He sends His representative, the spiritual master, or pure devotee. This is also the planned activity of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. They come to canvass and educate, and thus a person in the illusory energy of the Supreme Lord gets a chance to mix with them, talk with them and take lessons from them, and somehow or



other if a conditioned soul surrenders to such personalities and by intimate association with them chances to become Kṛṣṇa conscious, he is saved from the material conditions of life.

—*Bhāg.* 4.21.27, purport

Therefore, when we are moving in the world, we should move as devotees, if not always in dress, at least in consciousness. ISKCON is no longer a movement of *brahmacārīs*, but consists primarily of householders, who work to support their families. Although we may not always be able to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness directly, we can fix our minds on Prabhu-pāda's definition of nonviolence and give Kṛṣṇa consciousness in whatever way is possible according to time, place, and persons.

# *Tolerance and Nonviolence*

If we practice an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, soon the whole world will be blind and toothless.

—Mahatma Gandhi

TO BECOME COMPASSIONATE, WE FIRST HAVE TO LEARN how to tolerate. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the example of an apartment dweller's right to live in his own apartment and equated the apartment with the body. It is criminal, he said, to take or destroy another person's home. Similarly, it is criminal to deny a soul the right karma has bestowed upon it to live in a particular body.

Tolerance means we recognize that right even when it causes us inconvenience. In a talk in his garden in Los Angeles, Śrīla Prabhupāda defined love to a group of college professors as not killing. They were discussing the difference between Kṛṣṇa consciousness and Christianity, and one professor in particular was trying to emphasize the value of loving one's fellow man as the highest expression of love of God. Prabhupāda explained that first we must love God, because then our love will be "distributed"; by watering the root of a tree, we water the whole tree:

Prabhupāda: . . . it is not your business to go to every department and pay tax. Pay to the treasury of the government; it will be distributed. This is intelligence. And if you say that "Why shall I pay to the treasury house? I shall pay the this department, that department, that department, that department," you can go on, but it will never be sufficient, neither complete. So you may love humanity, but because you do not love Kṛṣṇa, therefore you do not love the cows; you send them to slaughterhouse. So your love will remain defective. It will never be complete. And if you love Kṛṣṇa, then you will love even the small ant. You will be not interested even to kill even an ant. That is real love.

Dr. Pore: I agree with you that we love very badly and we slaughter the animals.

Prabhupāda: Yes. So badly love is not love.



Dr. Pore: But is the converse true, that we chant very well and that we can love Kṛṣṇa even when we cannot love our fellow people?

Prabhupāda: Oh, that . . . We are not . . . chanting . . . We are also working. It is not that we are simply sitting down and chanting. Because we are chanting, therefore we are loving everyone. That is a fact. These Hare Kṛṣṇa chanters, they will never agree to kill any animal, even a plant, because they know everything is part and parcel of God. Why unnecessarily one should be killed? That is love.

Dr. Pore: Love means never killing?

Prabhupāda: There are so many things. It is one of the items. . . . Do you kill your own son? Why? Because you love him.

—Garden Conversation, June 24, 1975, Los Angeles

Devotees learn tolerance by learning to love Kṛṣṇa. By loving Kṛṣṇa, they will automatically feel a respect for other living entities and not feel a need to kill them. As Śrīla Prabhupāda says, one of the items of love is not killing. If we can show no other form of compassion, at least we can avoid killing.

Part of tolerance is to recognize that we are not supreme and that our rights over others are limited. "Everything animate or inanimate that is within the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord. One should therefore accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota, and one should not accept other things, knowing well to whom they belong." (*Īśopaniṣad*, Mantra 1)

Therefore, the root of tolerance is humility before God. We have each been given a quota by God, and we each have a right to that quota. Prabhupāda equates tolerance with compassion. Tolerance means to accept any inconvenience imposed upon us; compassion means we accept the inconvenience when it is caused by other living entities and do not wish them harm. A Vaiṣṇava tolerates such inconveniences simply for the benefit of others. When Mahārāja Parikṣit was cursed by Śamika Mṣi's son, he chose not to counteract the curse but instead agreed to die. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

It is said that the beauty of a *tapasvī*, or saintly person, is forgiveness. There are many instances in the spiritual history of the world in which many saintly persons, although unnecessarily harassed, did not take



action, although they could have done so. Parikṣit Mahārāja, for example, was unnecessarily cursed by a *brāhmaṇa* boy, and this was very much regretted by the boy's father, but Parikṣit Mahārāja accepted the curse and agreed to die within a week as the *brāhmaṇa* boy desired. Parikṣit Mahārāja was the emperor and was full in power both spiritually and materially, but out of compassion and out of respect for the *brāhmaṇa* community, he did not counteract the action of the *brāhmaṇa* boy but agreed to die within seven days. Because it was desired by Kṛṣṇa that Parikṣit Mahārāja agree to the punishment so that the instruction of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* would thus be revealed to the world, Parikṣit Mahārāja was advised not to take action. A Vaiṣṇava is personally tolerant for the benefit of others. When he does not show his prowess, this does not mean that he is lacking in strength; rather, it indicates that he is tolerant for the welfare of the entire human society.

—*Bhāg.* 4.6.48, purport

Tolerance is a noble quality—the ability not to strike back at someone (or some living entity) who is trying to harm us in some way simply so that person or thing will not have to suffer difficulty. That is the deeper practice of nonviolence, that we not only avoid harming other creatures unnecessarily, but that we always wish them well and thus refuse to retaliate. Therefore, Prabhupāda equates tolerance with compassion, and we can also say that both qualities are born from humility. If we recognize that we are not better than others due to our all being souls under the same God, we will be better able to tolerate insults directed at us from others.

Another example from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* of great tolerance in the face of personal tragedy is Draupadī's request that Aśvatthāmā be spared after killing her five sons. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The feeling of equality was there because Draupadī spoke out of her personal experience. A barren woman cannot understand the grief of a mother. Draupadī was herself a mother, and therefore her calculation of the depth of Kṛpī's grief was quite to the point." That she could feel for Kṛpī despite the fact that she was grieving for her own murdered sons shows her high-mindedness. To deny oneself retribution, even when there is such cause, to simply avoid giving others pain, is tolerance.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's point that only a mother can understand another mother's pain is applicable to any kind of suffering. It is therefore easier



to learn tolerance when we ourselves have suffered. Suffering humbles us and makes us more human. The *Bhāgavatam* states, "A poverty-stricken man must automatically undergo austerities and penances because he does not have the wealth to possess anything. Thus his false prestige is vanquished. . . . Undergoing such compulsory austerities is good for him because this purifies him and completely frees him from false ego." (*Bhāg.* 10.10.15) When we are humbled, we can feel more equal with others, and therefore more tolerant.

But tolerance toward others is only really possible when we tolerate our own suffering as a reaction to our own past misdeeds. That is, when we don't curse anyone for causing it (*tat te 'nukampām susamikṣamāṇaḥ*). "A devotee is naturally so humble and meek that he accepts any condition of life as a blessing from the Lord. . . . A devotee always accepts punishment from anyone as the mercy of the Lord. If one lives in this conception of life, he sees whatever reverses occur to be due to his past misdeeds, and therefore he never accuses anyone. On the contrary, he becomes increasingly attached to the Supreme Personality of Godhead because of his being purified by his suffering. Suffering, therefore, is also a process of purification." (*Bhāg.* 6.17.17, purport) The desire for retribution arises from material consciousness.

Despite these instructions, it is not easy to be tolerant in this world. That one living entity must live at the expense of another means that one living entity's rights will cause another living entity inconvenience, even death. Therefore, there is always a conflict of interests, and no one can escape that eventuality. We see this principle in politics. One group of people thinks a particular situation would be best for the country; another disagrees. Is it possible to honor equally the many opinions people hold? It's simply not possible to give everyone what they think they are entitled to, especially when people think they are entitled to more than their karma allows.

To live peacefully in this world requires tolerance. The attempt to practice tolerance is part of our attempt to attain love of God.



## Compassion vs. Justice

IT IS NATURAL WHEN WE DISCUSS COMPASSION to wonder how it measures up with justice. In the example of Draupadī wanting to excuse Aśvatthāmā after her sons had been murdered, although we can praise Draupadī's compassion, we also wonder whether justice was done. After all, Aśvatthāmā's crimes were heinous. In his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.7.42, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

Aśvatthāmā was condemned by the Lord Himself, and he was treated by Arjuna just like a culprit, not like the son of a *brāhmaṇa* or teacher. But when he was brought before Śrīmatī Draupadī, she, although begrieved for the murder of her sons, and although the murderer was present before her, could not withdraw the due respect generally offered to a *brāhmaṇa* or to the son of a *brāhmaṇa*. This is due to her mild nature as a woman. Women as a class are no better than boys, and therefore they have no discriminatory power like that of a man. Aśvatthāmā proved himself to be an unworthy son of Droṇācārya or of a *brāhmaṇa*, and for this reason he was condemned by the greatest authority, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and yet a mild woman could not withdraw her natural courtesy for a *brāhmaṇa*.

Even to date, in a Hindu family a woman shows proper respect to the *brāhmaṇa* caste, however fallen and heinous a *brahma-bandhu* may be. But the men have begun to protest against *brahma-bandhus* who are born in families of good *brāhmaṇas* but by action are less than *sūdras*.

The specific words used in this *śloka* are *vāma-svabhāvā*, "mild and gentle by nature." A good man or woman accepts anything very easily, but a man of average intelligence does not do so. But, anyway, we should not give up our reason and discriminatory power just to be gentle. One must have good discriminatory power to judge a thing on its merit. We should not follow the mild nature of a woman and thereby accept that which is not genuine. Aśvatthāmā may be respected by a good-natured woman, but that does not mean that he is as good as a genuine *brāhmaṇa*.



The issue of compassion vs. justice is rarely settled once and for all. In ISKCON, we have had numerous occasions to debate the value of each. I remember attending one emergency GBC meeting in which we were to discuss the misdeeds of two of the ISKCON gurus. We were still new at dealing with such issues. Some of us wanted to punish the offenders, and some of us preferred to forgive them. I remember one Godbrother quoted this purport in favor of punishment.

I certainly cannot settle this issue in this book. The decision of whether to extend mercy or to deal justice is something that must be judged on a case-by-case basis. But Prabhupāda's point here is that while the compassionate response is usually best, based as it is on a Vaiṣṇava's gentle behavior, we should not lose our discrimination. In this case, Kṛṣṇa Himself condemned Aśvatthāmā, and in the end, after Arjuna had shamed him, Kṛṣṇa chose to punish him further by exiling him from human society.

Discrimination will help us determine when to show mercy and when to punish. As we practice devotional service, we tend to become gentled. We begin to abhor violence and prefer peace. But there are times when violence is proper. Kṛṣṇa ordered Arjuna to fight on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra. He has also empowered many divine monarchs (*naradevas*) to control and punish the criminal elements in human society. The *Bhāgavatam* stories are full of such *kṣatriyas* using violence to subdue those who act outside the law.

One somewhat different example of a *kṣatriya* being prepared to use violence to protect the citizens is the story of Mahārāja Pṛthu. Mahārāja Pṛthu was prepared to kill the earth, even after she assumed the form of a cow, in order to feed the hungry citizens. The *Bhāgavatam* refers to his willingness to take extreme measures for the citizens' sake compassionate. The word *kṣatriya* means to protect from hurt.

But even the *kṣatriya*'s use of violence must be regulated and just. Ultimately, it must be based on the compassionate desire to protect the weak. When Uttama was killed, his brother Dhruva went out to avenge him. Although only one Yakṣa had killed his brother, in anger, Dhruva decided to exterminate the entire Yakṣa race. But "When Svāyambhuva Manu saw that his grandson Dhruva Mahārāja was killing so many of the Yakṣas who were not actually offenders, out of his great compassion he

approached Dhruva with great sages to give him good instruction.” (*Bhāg.* 4.11.6) Such wholesale killing is never justified.

Still, a *kṣatriya* should always protect—which may include resorting to violence—the defenseless members of society: women, children, *brāhmaṇas*, cows, and the elderly. Thus violence according to scriptural principles and used by authorized persons is not condemned. Within those injunctions, the question of compassion vs. justice finds its only resolution.



# Spiritual Life Without Nonviolence is Nonsense

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Mahārāja Parīkṣit said that only the animal-killer cannot relish the transcendental message of the Supreme Lord. Therefore if people are to be educated to the path of Godhead, they must be taught first and foremost to *stop the process of animal killing*. . . . *It is nonsensical to say that animal killing has nothing to do with spiritual realization.*

—Bhāg. 1.3.24, purport

**P**RABHUPĀDA SPEAKS STRONGLY IN HIS BOOKS and talks against killing animals. He noticed that there was a lot of popular support for the Buddha incarnation in the West, but he considered it nonsense if the followers were still slaughtering animals.

As devotees in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, we too may not have developed the deeper implications of a nonviolent character, but over time, we should see it begin to develop. It may be that at present, we find it difficult to tolerate one another, what to speak of the nondevotees, and we should recognize that as a lack of compassion, yet we should care to nourish the compassionate nature within ourselves by doing whatever is necessary to bring that about. Often, we can learn to express compassion by the simple acts of helping people in very physical ways, like sharing *prasādam*, clothing, shelter, and friendship. Usually for the development of the compassionate nature, those acts are just as important as sharing philosophical knowledge. We can also choose not to harm other creatures, whether human, plant, or animal.

During the question and answer session of a recent class I gave, one devotee quoted the aphorism, “You have to be cruel to be kind.” I thought, “You say that, but you don’t realize how cruel we already are. Rather, we really need to learn to be kind—kind according to the dictionary definition of the word.” The dictionary defines *kindness* as having “a good and benevolent nature; consideration, helpfulness; the quality of being humane.” If we really want to stop the little cruelties that often fill our thoughts, we must actually practice kindness.



I witnessed the opposite of humaneness when I was in a campground one night, sleeping in the van, with a few devotees. We were on a preaching trip around the United States. We were suddenly awakened by a loud stomping outside. I looked out the window and saw a man near the campground bathroom killing the insects that had come out, attracted by the light. It seemed so horrible, so cruel, but he seemed to have no conscience about what he was doing.

Can we recognize the cruelty in our own hearts? During that same question and answer session, one devotee was humorously criticizing herself. She said she had just returned from Vṛndāvana where she saw firsthand the poverty of the local people. She knew the devotees had a program to distribute clothes and *prasādam*, but she said she didn't take part because she thought such activity wasn't spiritual enough. Then she realized that she wasn't doing anything spiritual for those people either. She realized that she had passed up an opportunity to be kind and perhaps to do something good for her own heart.

We often think of kindness and compassion as larger projects, but we can learn to practice them in ways that are possible for us—in small ways. We may be able to help devotees in a variety of ways, most of them practical. Sometimes devotees need help with their children, or are ill, or in need of money. There are many ways in which we can be charitable. Any kindness we offer to another is going to cost us something—we may lose sleep or money—but spiritual life without this sense of kindness, which in turns teaches us to be nonviolent, is nonsense.



# *Absolution for Accidental or Unavoidable Violence*

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IT'S INEVITABLE THAT NO MATTER HOW CONSCIENTIOUS we are not to commit violence toward other creatures, we will still be guilty of harming some of them. We unknowingly crush ants or other small insects when we walk; we accidentally crush a spider under our drinking glass; we throw wood in the stove, but it's full of hibernating beetles; we drive a vehicle, and hundreds of insects are smashed against our headlights and windshield. In this society, we often have no choice but to participate in the violent acts of others—perhaps we have to buy milk that is produced in factory farms. Many of the products that we use regularly contain animal products—soaps and film, for example. We have to take responsibility for that violence.

Therefore, we devotees cannot call ourselves perfectly nonviolent, especially if we make little effort to avoid animal products. More and more people in the West are becoming aware of products that use animal ingredients, and although they may not have the deeper Kṛṣṇa conscious motive, they are good at practicing nonviolence in a violent world. If we are making little endeavor in this regard, we shouldn't be proud of our nonviolence.

Still, devotees like to practice nonviolence, and we usually feel awful when we suddenly discover that the ingredients of something we have been using were acquired by violent means. What can we do to absolve ourselves?

The main thing is to be sure that we are fully engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We should not risk acting in this world without the shelter of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When we travel, we should travel for a Kṛṣṇa conscious purpose; when we eat, we should offer our food to Kṛṣṇa. We will commit unintentional violence no matter what we do in this world—whether we travel or stay at home—but whatever we do will be purified when we offer our lives to Kṛṣṇa. That is the meaning of *yajña*. The best *yajña* in this age is the *saṅkīrtana-yajña*, which when considered in its broader context, includes all the services we render in order to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others.

From the purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.3.24:

*Abhimsām* indicates that one should not commit violence against any living entity. . . . Ultimately the material world is full of violence, and the laws of nature, which impose old age, disease and death upon every living creature, are themselves filled with violence. Therefore, if somehow or other one can convince others to surrender to Kṛṣṇa and thus release themselves from the violent laws of material nature, that is the perfection of *abhimsā*.



# 3

## *Ḍīna-bandhu: Kṛṣṇa's Compassion for the Fallen Souls*

Alas, how shall I take shelter of one more merciful than He who granted the position of mother to a she-demon [Pūtānā] although she was unfaithful and she prepared deadly poison to be sucked from her breast?

. . . The Lord accepts the least qualification of the living entity and awards him the highest reward. That is the standard of His character. Therefore, who but the Lord can be the ultimate shelter?

—*Bhāg.* 3.2.23, and purport





## *Does Kṛṣṇa Feel Compassion for the Fallen Living Entity?*

THE *BHĀGAVATAM* (1.16.26–30) GIVES A LIST of Kṛṣṇa's qualities. Early in the list is "(3) intolerance of another's unhappiness." There is also "(5) self-satisfaction," "(9) responsibility," "(10) equality," "(11) tolerance," "(12) equanimity," "(19) the power to make everything possible," "(25) kindheartedness," "(27) gentility," "(28) magnanimity . . . and many other transcendental qualities which are eternally present and never to be separated from Him."

In relation to some of the qualities listed here, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī asks a series of questions: "How can the Supreme Lord feel compassion, since by definition, compassion means to identify with other's suffering? If Kṛṣṇa does feel compassion for the living entities, how can He then be all-blissful and free from all pain?"

In response, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī explains that this and other apparent contradictions in relation to Kṛṣṇa are cleared simply by understanding Kṛṣṇa's inconceivable potency. Kṛṣṇa can be both all-blissful and be concerned for the living entities.

It is important especially for devotees to understand this point. Christian theology has a different angle on this question. Christians accept the idea of God coming among us in the incarnation, Jesus. That is, Jesus is God in flesh and blood. Although he was born from a sinless mother and without actual conception through the potency of a man, he took what appeared to be a normal, human birth. That is said to have been his first humility, his first act of compassion: he felt the pain that we all feel upon taking birth in this world. His life story continues until his final act of compassion at the crucifixion where he died naked, scorned, and in great pain.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said something a little different about the nature of pure devotees. That is, that such an incarnation would have a spiritual body and would not actually be subject to the same sense of pain as those in a material body. The Christians would consider this heresy, and have consistently driven any expressed ideas like this out of the Church.



Here, however, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī speaks about the inconceivable powers of God to be two or more things at once and yet still be full in truth. Kṛṣṇa and His pure devotees do not have to suffer with a material body in order to feel compassion for the fallen souls. In his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.16.26–30, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: “Even if it were possible to count the atoms after smashing the earth into powder, still it would not be possible to estimate the unfathomable transcendental qualities of the Lord. . . . The above statement of the qualities of the Lord is just to estimate His qualities as far as a human being is able to see Him.”

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī goes on to say that there is a quality to Kṛṣṇa’s compassion. Śrīla Prabhupāda cites his commentary in his own purport:

According to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, the third quality, intolerance of another’s unhappiness, can be subdivided into (1) protection of the surrendered souls and (2) well wishes for the devotees. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* the Lord states that He wants every soul to surrender unto Him only, and He assures everyone that if one does so He will give protection from the reactions of all sins. Unsurrendered souls are not devotees of the Lord, and thus there is no particular protection for everyone in general. For the devotees He has all good wishes, and for those who are actually engaged in loving transcendental service of the Lord, He gives particular attention. He gives direction to such pure devotees to help them discharge their responsibilities on the path back to Godhead. By equality (10), the Lord is equally kind to everyone, as the sun is equal in distributing its rays over everyone. Yet there are many who are unable to take advantage of the sun’s rays. Similarly, the Lord says that surrendering unto Him is the guarantee for all protection from Him, but unfortunate persons are unable to accept this proposition, and therefore they suffer from all material miseries. So even though the Lord is equally well-wishing to everyone, the unfortunate living being, due to bad association only, is unable to accept His instructions *in toto*, and for this the Lord is never to be blamed. He is called the well-wisher for the devotees only. He appears to be partial to His devotees, but factually the matter rests on the living being to accept or reject equal treatment by the Lord.

—*Bhāg.* 1.16.26–30, purport



*Dīna-bandhu: Kṛṣṇa's Compassion for the Fallen Souls*

However, we cannot determine the form in which the Lord's compassion appears. Kṛṣṇa Himself makes several statements about how He reveals His compassion for all living entities. For example, He creates the material world simply to provide an opportunity for fallen souls to find Him and surrender. He also chooses not to remove our free will. He appears in a variety of forms to entice us back to Him:

Thus it is out of compassion that the Lord appears in His different forms. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared on this planet out of compassion for fallen souls; Lord Buddha appeared out of compassion for the poor animals who were being killed by the demons; Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva appeared out of compassion for Prahlaḍa Mahārāja. The conclusion is that the Lord is so compassionate upon the fallen souls within this material world that He comes Himself or sends His devotees and His servants to fulfill His desire to have all the fallen souls come back home, back to Godhead. Thus Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa instructed *Bhagavad-gītā* to Arjuna for the benefit of the entire human society. Intelligent men should therefore seriously consider this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and fully utilize the instructions of *Bhagavad-gītā* as preached without adulteration by His pure devotees.

—*Bhāg.* 4.22.42, purport

And for a soul struggling to surrender to Him, Kṛṣṇa makes this promise: "When I feel special compassion for someone, I gradually deprive him of his wealth. Then the poverty-stricken man's children, wife and other relations all abandon him. When he again tries to acquire wealth in order to win back his family's favor, I mercifully frustrate him so that he becomes disgusted with fruitive work and befriends My devotees. And at that time I bestow upon him My extraordinary grace; then he can become freed from the bondage of material life and attain to the kingdom of God, Vaikuṇṭha." (*Bhāg.* 10.88, chapter summary)



# The Compassionate Purpose for the Creation and the Question of Free Will

IN KṚṢṆA BOOK, ŚRĪLA PRABHUPĀDA TELLS how Mahā-Viṣṇu is lying down in *yoga-nidrā* and the *Vedas* personified sing His glories to awaken Him so He can begin the creation:

O unconquerable Lord, You are the Supreme Personality. No one is equal to You or greater than You. No one can be more glorious in his activities. All glories unto You! All glories unto You! By Your own transcendental nature You fully possess all six opulences. As such, You are able to deliver all conditioned souls from the clutches of *māyā*. O Lord, we fervently pray that You kindly do so. All the living entities, being Your parts and parcels, are naturally joyful, eternal and full of knowledge, but due to their own faults they try to imitate You by trying to become the supreme enjoyer. Thus they disobey Your supremacy and become offenders. And because of their offenses, Your material energy has taken charge of them. Thus their transcendental qualities of joyfulness, bliss and wisdom have been covered by the clouds of the three material qualities. This cosmic manifestation, made of the three material qualities, is just like a prison house for the conditioned souls. The conditioned souls are struggling very hard to escape from material bondage, and according to their different conditions of life they have been given different types of engagement. But since all engagements are based on knowledge supplied by You, the conditioned souls can execute pious activities only when You mercifully inspire them to do so. Therefore, without taking shelter at Your lotus feet one cannot surpass the influence of material energy. Actually, we, as personified Vedic knowledge, are always engaged in Your service by helping the conditioned souls understand You.

—Kṛṣṇa, Chapter 87, Volume 2, p. 330



## *Dīna-bandhū: Kṛṣṇa's Compassion for the Fallen Souls*

Prabhupāda writes that the *Vedas* are meant to help the conditioned souls to understand Kṛṣṇa. "Of all His glories, the most important is His causeless mercy upon the conditioned souls in reclaiming them from the clutches of *māyā*."

Only if the Lord again creates the universe after the devastation will the living entities have the chance to enact their karma and learn either by suffering or by meeting a pure devotee that the purpose of life is not material enjoyment. The most fortunate living entities meet a guru, who then instructs them on how to become free of the modes of material nature (*brahmāṇḍa bhramite kona bhāgyavān jīva*). None of this is possible while the souls lie dormant in Mahā-Viṣṇu's abdomen. Therefore, one of the Lord's primary acts of compassion is to create the material world.

Whenever this topic is discussed, it seems someone will always ask the question, "Why should there be any creation in the first place? Creation only means suffering. If Kṛṣṇa is compassionate, why doesn't He simply bring everyone back to Godhead by arranging for us *jīvas* to be in agreement with Him?"

But that is not how Kṛṣṇa chooses to show His compassion. Rather, He wants the living entities to maintain their free will. This is because Kṛṣṇa is interested in love. Love is voluntary; there is no question of forcing love. Therefore, His compassion is not to remove our free will but to allow us our choice while never abandoning us regardless of where we wander.

If we wish to return to Kṛṣṇa through His compassion, we will first have to accept that we are constitutionally His eternal servants. We cannot be happy acting outside our constitutional position. Actually, it is impossible to act outside that position. That is the meaning of "constitutional." Kṛṣṇa states in *Bhagavad-gītā*, "As all surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Pṛthā." (Bg. 4.11) It is impossible for the living entity to do anything but Kṛṣṇa's will. Therefore, it is simply a matter of our volition: we either follow the Lord in love, or we follow Him in ignorance.

In our original state, the living entity loves and serves Kṛṣṇa in one of the five mellows. The love is freely given and is therefore so dear to the Lord that He feels He cannot repay it. Love that is offered out of fear of God's mightiness is not really love. Even love offered dutifully to one's maintainer does not have the flavor of pure love. We each naturally have



a loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa that at present lies dormant. Kṛṣṇa provides the material creation as a place in which we can find our need for Him, and thus open the door to that hidden love.

This question of free love is expanded in the *bhakti* science. The *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* draws a distinction between the various kinds of voluntary love and reveals the type of relationship that is most tasteful to Kṛṣṇa:

But in the course of exchanging transcendental love of the highest purity, sometimes the subordinate devotee tries to predominate over the predominator. One who lovingly engages with the Supreme Lord as if His mother or father sometimes supersedes the position of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Similarly, His fiancé or lover sometimes supersedes the position of the Lord. But such attempts are exhibitions of the highest love. Only out of pure love does the subordinate lover of the Supreme Personality of Godhead chide Him. The Lord, enjoying this chiding, takes it very nicely. The exhibition of natural love makes such activities very enjoyable. In worship of the Supreme Lord with veneration there is no manifestation of such natural love because the devotee considers the Lord his superior.

Regulative principles in devotional service are meant for those who have not invoked their natural love of Godhead. When natural love arises, all regulative methods are surpassed, and pure love is exhibited between the Lord and the devotee. Although on such a platform of love the devotee sometimes appears to predominate over the Lord or transgress regulative principles, such dealings are far more advanced than ordinary dealings through regulative principles with awe and veneration. A devotee who is actually free from all designations due to complete attachment in love for the Supreme exhibits spontaneous love for Godhead, which is always superior to the devotion of regulative principles.

—Cc. *Ādi* 4.26, purport

An indication of Kṛṣṇa's quality as a lover is His unwillingness to force the *jīva* to love Him in return, even though it is in the *jīva*'s best interest to do so. This is how Kṛṣṇa shows compassion.

And Kṛṣṇa has arranged that life in the material world does not have to be an eternal prison sentence. He Himself descends into this world,



and sends His pure devotees, in order to deliver the conditioned souls. When Kṛṣṇa descends, this is His compassion. As He says in *Bhagavad-gītā* 4.8, "To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I Myself appear, millennium after millennium."

The Supreme Lord is not forced to appear. Indeed, no one can subject Him to force, for He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Everyone is under His control, and He is not under the control of anyone else. . . . According to the *Viśva-kosā* dictionary, the word *māyā* is used in the sense of "false pride" and also in the sense of "compassion." . . . As the Lord says in *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.14), *daivī hy eṣā guṇa-mayī mama māyā duratyayā*: "This divine energy of Mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is difficult to overcome." But when Kṛṣṇa comes the word *māyā* refers to His compassion or mercy upon the devotees and fallen souls. By His potency, the Lord can deliver everyone, whether sinful or pious.

—*Bhāg.* 9.24.57, purport

There is another reason why Kṛṣṇa provides us with the material creation, and this reason too points to His compassionate nature. He creates the material world because we want it. Kṛṣṇa is a liberal father, and we His foolish children. A liberal father will advise his children against their foolishness, but ultimately, when they cajole him, he will give in. Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated that the living entities want the material creation to play out their attempt to imitate Kṛṣṇa. This is because we are envious of His all-supreme, all-blissful position. Kṛṣṇa provides the creation, and He knows the pain that will accompany the *jīvas*' attempt to enjoy in this unreal world. Therefore, out of His kindness, He does not simply abandon them, but accompanies them through all species as the Supersoul in the heart.

Part of parenthood is allowing one's children to learn from their own mistakes. That too is compassion. Sometimes we really must suffer in order to come to our senses. Śrīla Prabhupāda gives the example of a child who wanted the moon. It is impossible for any parent to deliver his child the moon, so if the child is insistent, the parent gives the child a mirror to reflect the moon. The foolish child then believes he is holding the moon

in his hand. This material world is like that same reflected happiness. There is nothing there, but still we chase it. Eventually, we will become tired of our toy and look for reality. This eventuality would not be possible if Kṛṣṇa simply denied our original desire to be separate from Him.

Kṛṣṇa especially revealed His mercy on the fallen souls by descending as Lord Caitanya. Not only did Lord Caitanya make His mercy easy to achieve, He taught a simple way by which we could reawaken our dormant love of God. He also exemplified for the fallen souls of Kali-yuga how to practice devotional service. This was the Lord's greatest compassion, because love of God is both the answer to our suffering and our greatest happiness. Thus Lord Caitanya has provided us the means by which we can fulfill the purpose of the material creation.



## Attracting Kṛṣṇa's Compassion

**K**ṚṢṆA IS KNOWN AS DĪNA-BANDHU AND DĪNA-NĀTHA, friend and Lord of the poor. To meet Kṛṣṇa in this way, Prabhupāda has said we need to express a legitimate need for His mercy, and to become *akiñcana*.

But we don't feel our legitimate need, our complete dependence on Kṛṣṇa, and we are not free of material desires or designations. We are spiritually poor. How, then, can we hope to attract Kṛṣṇa's compassion?

Recognizing our spiritual poverty is the first step in learning to feel dependent on Kṛṣṇa. To recognize our poverty means we have to also face why we are holding back from surrender. Usually, fear is holding us back from full dependence—either fear that Kṛṣṇa will not protect us adequately, or fear that His protection may not mesh with our own idea of comfort. We may also be afraid of the higher states of *bhakti* where we feel everything taken away *but* Kṛṣṇa, and our lives are turned upside down in love of God. Fear, of course, is the result of attachment. We prefer not to put ourselves into any extreme positions.

Therefore, spiritual poverty refers to the awareness and admittance that we have no spiritual qualities. The scriptures are full of lists of devotional qualities—devotees are completely attached to Kṛṣṇa, completely honest, meek, humble, clean, surrendered, nonenvious, well versed in the scripture, and simple. We must face that we don't actually possess these qualities. When we face that fact, we can go before God as we truly are: without anything.

The enemy of spiritual poverty is pride. Those who are proud claim qualities they do not possess, or possess only in small amount. Such people generally do not understand the inner nature of the qualities but measure them by their external manifestation: "I gave so much to the temple, so I'm a religious person." Prabhupāda writes that "the chief function of the false ego is godlessness." (*Bhāg.* 3.5.31, purport) Therefore, we should be interested in truth. We come closer to personal truth through introspection and by hearing about the great saints, those who did possess spiritual qualities.



When we face the truth about ourselves, we realize both that we are utterly helpless and that only Kṛṣṇa can help us. When we are that dependent upon Him, Kṛṣṇa will certainly help us.

Bhīṣmadeva expressed this complete dependence on Kṛṣṇa when he was on his deathbed. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

The Supreme Lord, the Absolute Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, although equal to everyone, is still more inclined to His unflinching devotee who is completely surrendered and knows no one else as his protector and master. Having unflinching faith in the Supreme Lord as one's protector, friend and master is the natural condition of eternal life. A living entity is so made by the will of the Almighty that he is most happy when placing himself in a condition of absolute dependence.

The opposite tendency is the cause of falldown. The living entity has this tendency of falling down by dint of misidentifying himself as fully independent to lord it over the material world. The root cause of all troubles is there in false egotism. One must draw towards the Lord in all circumstances.

—*Bhāg.* 1.9.22, purport

Recently, a devotee told me how she was in the most desperate physical and mental state that she has ever experienced. Out of her desperation came an awareness that she was completely dependent on Kṛṣṇa's mercy. She said that chanting became the most important activity in her life. She realized her spiritual poverty, and because she was already inclined to surrender to Kṛṣṇa, her material distress pushed her toward taking greater shelter of the Lord.

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, we see examples of devotees experiencing or praying for the consciousness that leads to pure dependence on Kṛṣṇa. Queen Kuntī prayed that the calamities would come again and again, because such tribulations left her with nothing but Kṛṣṇa's shelter.

Spiritual poverty is a powerful way to attract Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Because He is Dīna-bandhu, He will come to help His devotee who feels he is genuinely in need of the Lord's mercy. Without that genuineness behind our cry to Kṛṣṇa, we will not be able to attract Him as much.

Kṛṣṇa is very kind to His devotees no matter what their degree of surrender. His mercy is generalized when it is directed toward the nondevotees,



but to the devotees He gives His full concern. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa is famous as *bhakta-vatsala*:

The Lord says that those who are advanced in transcendental knowledge and know the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness are very dear to Him, and He also is very dear to them. . . . Persons, however, who may not even be conversant with knowledge of the Supreme Personality but who always think of the Lord with love and faith, feeling that He is great and that they are His parts and parcels, ever His servitors, are even more favored by Him. The particular significance of this verse is that the Lord is addressed as *vatsala*. *Vatsala* means “always favorably disposed.” The Lord’s name is *bhakta-vatsala*. The Lord is famous as *bhakta-vatsala*, which means that He is always favorably inclined to the devotees, . . .

—*Bhāg.* 4.7.38, purport

For those devotees who are sincere but who still have material attachment, Kṛṣṇa does them the special favor of breaking their material success (*yasyāham anugrṇāmi hariṣye tad-dhanam śanaiḥ*). Śrīla Prabhupāda said that this verse was applicable to his own life. We should never think that Kṛṣṇa is neutral toward us. Kṛṣṇa Himself states in *Bhagavad-gītā*, “I envy no one, nor am I partial to anyone. I am equal to all. But whoever renders service unto Me in devotion is a friend, is in Me, and I am also a friend to him.” (Bg. 9.29) In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

One may question here that if Kṛṣṇa is equal to everyone and no one is His special friend, then why does He take a special interest in the devotees who are always engaged in His transcendental service? But this is not discrimination; it is natural. Any man in this material world may be very charitably disposed, yet he has a special interest in his own children. The Lord claims that every living entity—in whatever form—is His son, and so He provides everyone with a generous supply of the necessities of life. He is just like a cloud which pours rain all over, regardless of whether it falls on rock or land or water. But for His devotees, He gives specific attention. Such devotees are mentioned here: they are always in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and therefore they are always transcendently situated in Kṛṣṇa. The very phrase “Kṛṣṇa consciousness” suggests that those who are in such consciousness are living

transcendentalists, situated in Him. The Lord says here distinctly . . . “They are in Me.” Naturally, as a result, the Lord is also in them. This is reciprocal. This also explains the words . . . “Whoever surrenders unto Me, proportionately I take care of him.”

Kṛṣṇa does not close the door on any living entity; rather, He wants all of them to return to Him. All *jīvas* can become part of Kṛṣṇa’s family in an intimate relationship with Him. If they want it. “Voluntary endeavor is the only qualification for spiritual perfection.” (*Bhāg.* 3.9.38, purport) We should try to understand this information about Kṛṣṇa’s compassionate nature—His willingness to love all His parts and parcels—and we should respond accordingly.

. . . conditioned souls, have no choice but to accept their precarious condition under material nature. The only remedy is to surrender to Viṣṇu and always pray to be excused. One should depend only on the causeless mercy of the Lord for deliverance and not even slightly on one’s own strength. That is the perfect position of a Kṛṣṇa conscious person. The Lord is everyone’s friend, but He is especially friendly to the surrendered soul. The simple process, therefore, is that a conditioned soul should remain surrendered to the Lord, and the Lord will give him all protection to keep him out of the clutches of material contamination.

—*Bhāg.* 4.7.30, purport



# Kṛṣṇa Protects His Devotee

WE ALL KNOW THAT KṚṢṆA PROTECTS HIS DEVOTEES, but what exactly does that mean? Does Kṛṣṇa's protection, for example, extend over our material possessions? Our physical bodies? Devotees are often concerned about these questions.

There is no set answer. Kṛṣṇa will do whatever He feels is best for us, and that is the nature of His protection. Kṛṣṇa gave Sudāmā Vipra everything; He took everything away from Bali Mahārāja. Kṛṣṇa is known as Lord Hari, He who takes away. That Lord Hari protects us means that He takes away all the obstacles to our attaining full love of God. He protects us by providing instructions by which we can free ourselves from matter. He also protects us by sending us His pure devotees from whom we can learn. Ultimately, He gives us only those things that will never be lost. That is Kṛṣṇa's real protection. He is our best well-wishing friend and the master of our lives.

When we become devotees, we cannot stop Kṛṣṇa from acting on our behalf. We simply have to surrender to His care. The material body cannot ultimately be protected; its nature is to decay. We will have to leave it. The soul, however, is eternal, and any devotional service the soul performs is also eternal. The *Bhagavad-gītā* states, "In this endeavor there is no loss or diminution, and a little advancement on this path can protect one from the most dangerous type of fear." (Bg. 2.40) This means that no matter what else happens to us, Kṛṣṇa will protect our spiritual knowledge. That is the real meaning of His protection.

Therefore, the most practical way to become aware of Kṛṣṇa's loving protection is to surrender to Him. The easiest path to surrender is to hear from the pure devotees. From the pure devotees we can develop faith in the fact that nothing happens without the Lord's sanction.

The remedial measure to cure a patient by medical treatment is useless if it is not sanctioned by the Lord. To cross the river or the ocean



by a suitable boat is no remedial measure if it is not sanctioned by the Lord. We should know for certain that the Lord is the ultimate sanctioning officer, and we must therefore dedicate our attempts to the mercy of the Lord for ultimate success or to get rid of the obstacles on the path of success. The Lord is all-pervading, all-powerful, omniscient and omnipresent. He is the ultimate sanctioning agent of all good or bad effects. . . . It does not matter what one is. One must dedicate everything in the service of the Lord. . . . One should not think for a moment that the realization of Nārada was childish imagination only. It is not like that. It is so realized by the expert and erudite scholars, . . .

—*Bhāg.* 1.5.32, purport

We may think that since everything in this world is material and temporary, and since our material possessions are not the object of Kṛṣṇa's protection, that we have little responsibility for them. But we should see those material possessions, including our bodies, as Kṛṣṇa's property rather than our own. We have a responsibility to maintain them on His behalf. We should use what we have been given in Kṛṣṇa's service, and should not indulge in sense gratification. Life is not meant for sense gratification but for liberation. One should therefore maintain his health in order to have the sensual strength to practice *bhakti-yoga*.

So there is a reciprocal relationship between the Lord and His devotee. The Lord protects the devotee's *bhakti*, which may or may not include protection of his body or material possessions, and the devotee is grateful to the Lord for whatever He decides to do in that devotee's case. The Lord is interested in both protecting the devotee from the modes of material nature and glorifying the devotee's struggle to reach Him. Ultimately, we can only surrender to the Lord and trust that He is always personally protecting us. We should not treat the Lord like a bodyguard. If Kṛṣṇa says, "Arjuna, tell the world that My devotee will never be vanquished," we shouldn't look for His protection in material ways. It doesn't mean that we cannot lose a battle. It means we will not be permanently defeated; we will ultimately go back to Godhead.

We have seen practical examples of what some people might decide is a lack of protection on Kṛṣṇa's part. Devotees in some countries have



been killed and others suffer from chronic illness. We cannot understand how Kṛṣṇa is working with these devotees, but we should not doubt Him.

One time when I was Prabhupāda's secretary in Hawaii, Rūpānuga called to tell Prabhupāda that someone had thrown a fire bomb through the temple window. A boy had died. Prabhupāda asked, "Was he chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa?" Rūpānuga said, "Yes." Prabhupāda said, "We have to die sooner or later. If we take the opportunity to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, it's very good." Was that boy vanquished? Kṛṣṇa's protection of that soul cannot be assessed according to material considerations.

## God is Good, So Be Grateful

WE HAVE DISCUSSED THE VARIOUS FORMS Kṛṣṇa's kindness takes. To help the fallen souls, He creates the material cosmos and gives them the opportunity to come back to Him through their own suffering. He also descends in many forms to both annihilate the demons and to give encouragement to the pious. He sends His pure devotees into the world to teach those who are fortunate enough to meet them how to surrender to Him. For those who have begun on the path of devotional service, He offers His special protection, preserving what they have and carrying what they lack. Therefore, we have good reason to believe that God is compassionate toward the *jīvas* and that He is showing that compassion even when people are suffering. Kṛṣṇa is not a cruel God.

When we explain the ways of God to humankind, that's theology. Theology is actually meant to explain with reasonable arguments the proofs of God's existence and the particularities of His nature in relation to the world, His creatures, and Himself. Śrīla Prabhupāda presented us with quite a bit of theology in his books. Ultimately, however, we are meant to develop faith by reading that theology. Faith is, as Prabhupāda put it, "unflinching trust in something sublime." (Bg. 2.41, purport) After accepting the reality of God's existence, we learn to accept His qualities. One of His most prominent qualities is that He is all-good and all-compassionate. Let us therefore remind ourselves in our discussions that we are not primarily theologians trying to *prove* the truth of God's compassionate nature; we are devotees trying to learn how to respond to it.

The discussion of God's goodness reminds me of the story of Job in the Old Testament. The story begins when Satan challenges God that His devotees only worship Him because He provides them with material protection and goods. God disagrees. Then God and Satan make a bet. Satan tells God that he can break God's well-known and faithful servant, Job. God thinks that Job is too faithful to be broken. Job is then put through a series of torments, everything from infamy to physical pain to



losing his family members and all his wealth. At the end of the many chapters that tell this story, Job finally begins to complain to God, yet he does not lose his faith. In the end, God goes to see Job. Again he complains to God. God replies, "I am so great that you cannot understand My greatness or the greatness of the creation." God does not explain or apologize for His actions but simply glorifies His own power. Job continues faithfully, and God restores him to his former station.

What I like about this story is that despite all the suffering Job underwent, God did not feel it necessary to explain Himself. Even after the suffering had ended, Job received no real explanation of God's reason behind what he went through. Similarly, we must have the kind of faith in Kṛṣṇa that allows us the conviction that whatever we suffer or enjoy comes solely by His grace, by His arrangement.

Faith is an important quality in a devotee. We must have faith even in that which we cannot perceive with our senses. Kṛṣṇa is *adbokṣaja*, beyond the reach of our material senses. We will never truly understand all there is to know about Him or about the reasons why He does the things He does. We simply have to learn to accept.

I grew up nominally religious, with little sense of God's presence. Thinking back, I knew very little about Him, although I attended church weekly. When Prabhupāda came into my life, he brought with him a living, personal God. Prabhupāda said, "God lives, and you can live with Him." I had already been, like so many seekers of my generation, drifting away from the standard ideas about God before I met Prabhupāda, but Prabhupāda created a hunger in me to serve God. The God that Prabhupāda gave me was very attractive. He was playful, beautiful, young, and wonderful in so many ways. He was also mysterious. There were so many things about Him that I couldn't understand. How He could have married 16,108 wives, for example.

As time has gone on, I can't say that I understand much more about Kṛṣṇa. I still can't claim to understand why He has acted in my life in the particular ways that He has acted, and I can't say that I am even constantly aware of His presence. I have the theology of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in my mind, and to whatever degree I have responded to it mechanically, to that degree I don't feel Kṛṣṇa's active presence. Still, I have learned something about Kṛṣṇa from my guru and the *śāstra*, and I have developed faith in



what they say. Whatever doubts surface are intellectual doubts, not heart doubts, and I have learned both to answer them and to tolerate them.

The doubts have made me realize that ultimately, faith in God's goodness and compassion—or in any other aspect of God—is a choice we all must make. There is no ultimate logical argument that can silence all doubts once and for all. How can we say God is all-good if bad things happen to apparently good people? Look at Kosovo. What did those people do? We simply cannot see the exchange between God and any of His other creatures. We can barely understand His exchanges with us. Therefore, those kinds of questions sometimes live on in the minds of devotees even after they have developed a more heartfelt faith.

For me personally, I have had to face this question of God's benevolence in relation to the regular physical pain I experience. I have realized, however, that asking, "Why do I have headaches?" is like that man asking Prabhupāda, "Why is there anything?" Why the sky? Why the trees? Why the headaches? I don't know. It's that simple. I cannot understand what purpose they serve in my life, only that I have them, that they seem to be here to stay, and that I must learn to accept them as Kṛṣṇa's compassion on me. From that position of acceptance, room is left in our minds for wonder and appreciation. Kṛṣṇa has created everything for a purpose. If we are not to become lost either in bitterness at our own pain, or on the opposite extreme, a pantheistic or romantic wondering at things, we have to fill our lack of understanding with acceptance.

Beyond acceptance, we must learn to feel gratitude. A devotee recently told me of her personal crisis and how she was left with a deep sense of faith in and dependence on Kṛṣṇa. Suffering can have that effect if we see it as coming from Kṛṣṇa. If we see in this way, we will not regard our suffering as useless pain.

Indeed, they find that in the end it gives rise to unlimited pleasure, just as a stinging ointment applied by a physician cures his patient's infected eye. In addition, suffering helps protect the confidentiality of devotional service by discouraging intrusions by the faithless, and it also increases the eagerness with which the devotees call upon the Lord to appear. If the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu were complacently



*‘Dīna-bandhu: Kṛṣṇa’s Compassion for the Fallen Souls*

happy all the time, He would never have a reason to appear in this world . . .

—*Bhāg.* 10.88.8, purport

That purport goes on to give a commentary by Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura:

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī here counters a possible objection: “What fault would there be in God’s incarnating for some other reason than to deliver saintly persons from suffering?” The learned *ācārya* responds, “Yes, my dear brother, this makes good sense, but you are not expert in understanding spiritual moods. Please listen: It is at night that the sunrise becomes attractive, during the hot summer that cold water gives comfort, and during the cold winter months that warm water is pleasing. Lamplight appears attractive in darkness, not in the glaring light of day, and when one is distressed by hunger, food tastes especially good.” In other words, to strengthen his devotees’ mood of dependence on Him and longing for Him, the Lord arranges for His devotees to go through some suffering, and when He appears in order to deliver them, their gratitude and transcendental pleasure are boundless.

Prabhuṇāda brought us a personal God. He is all-good and always compassionate toward the living entities. We can have faith in that truth, and we can learn to be grateful.

# *Kṛṣṇa as Time*

WE RARELY THINK OF TIME AS OUR FRIEND. Rather, the word *time* evokes memory of that *Bhagavad-gītā* verse (11.32): “Time I am, the great destroyer of the worlds, and I have come here to destroy all people.” Time is Kṛṣṇa’s impersonal feature in this world, pushing us inexorably forward without allowing us to stop and breathe. “Eternal time is certainly the controller of different dimensions, from that of the atom up to the superdivisions of the duration of Brahmā’s life; but, nevertheless, it is controlled by the Supreme.” (*Bhāg.* 3.11.39) Time pushes nondevotee and devotee alike. But the verse goes on to say, “Time can control only those who are body conscious, even up to the Satyaloka or the other higher planets of the universe.” Kṛṣṇa is compassionate, and time is both His agent and the friend of one who is trying to surrender to Him.

It is that pushing action of time that allows us to see our life duration diminish and which gives impetus to our desire to increase our devotion. We have little time in which to perfect ourselves. Time allows us to watch matter decay. No matter how attached to it we are, we see we can never hold on to it forever. Everything dwindles and disappears over time. That understanding too provides us with an impetus to aspire for the eternal.

We have probably all faced the truth of our often lukewarm devotion. We lack realization of Kṛṣṇa’s presence in our lives, even though we have learned so much theology. The time factor provides the fire that fuels our desire to surrender. We fire our devotion in two ways: by association with pure devotees, who not only teach us but inspire us by their personal examples, and by the fear aroused when we watch ourselves moving helplessly toward death—first our relatives, and then our own. Death and time humble us. When we become humbled, we can better realize that nothing else has meaning but surrender to Kṛṣṇa.

The first qualification [for surrender] is that one should not be deluded by pride. Because the conditioned soul is puffed up, thinking



himself the lord of material nature, it is very difficult for him to surrender unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead. One should know by the cultivation of real knowledge that he is not lord of material nature; the Supreme Personality of Godhead is the Lord. When one is free from delusion caused by pride, he can begin the process of surrender. . . . Pride is due to illusion, for although one comes here, stays for a brief time and then goes away, he has the foolish notion that he is the lord of the world. He thus makes all things complicated, and he is always in trouble. The whole world moves under this impression. People are considering the land, this earth, to belong to human society, and they have divided the land under the false impression that they are the proprietors. One has to get out of this false notion that human society is the proprietor of this world. . . . These faulty associations bind one to this material world.

—Bg. 15.5, purport

By watching the action of time, we can free ourselves from our delusions and thus give up the pride that prevents us from surrendering to Kṛṣṇa.

The time factor is helpful in another way too. It helps us appreciate Kṛṣṇa's greatness when we see time in relation to the natural beauty of the material world. If we look for Kṛṣṇa's hand in nature, we will also realize just how long time is. We can feel Kṛṣṇa's presence in the sea, mountains, sky, or the seasonal changes because they are the closest we know to something eternal. From such appreciation, we can remember the real eternal world, Goloka Vṛndāvana, and Kṛṣṇa's pastimes there. In the spiritual world, Prabhupāda says, time is conspicuous by its absence. That insurmountable time that controls even the demigods is not found in Kṛṣṇa's eternal home. Time brings about the fading of all beautiful things in this world, but the spiritual world never fades. Therefore, meditation on time in this world can bring us to meditation on no-time in the spiritual world.

Awareness of time can also help us become more attentive to the small details of our lives and the world around us. When we are more attentive, we tend to be more appreciative and to see our own connection with Kṛṣṇa. We feel Him more in the moment, rather than thinking of Him as someone who appeared thousands of years ago. By focusing on small segments of time, we can cut through distraction and learn to see everything as linked to Kṛṣṇa. Material distractions force us to live either in the past or the

future (lamentation and hankering), but if we can focus on how Kṛṣṇa is with us in the present moment, we can learn to be more simple before God. Prabhupāda wrote in *The Light of the Bhāgavata*, “Even the material nature is a reflection of the kingdom of God.” We will never really see the material nature if we are not attentive to it as it is before us at this moment. “For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me.” The time factor can support that attentiveness.

Therefore, a devotee sees time as Kṛṣṇa’s agent and uses it to increase his devotion. Through time, Kṛṣṇa allows the devotee to see Him everywhere, and to move through his life, feeling the impetus to serve Him as fully as possible. Time allows us to see the true nature of the material world and to aspire for the eternal.



# 4

## Contemplation as Compassion

Mahārāja Parikṣit, fortunate as he was, got the impression of the Lord even in the womb of his mother, and thus his contemplation on the Lord was constantly with him. Once the impression of the transcendental form of the Lord is fixed in one's mind, one can never forget Him in any circumstance. Child Parikṣit, after coming out of the womb, was in the habit of examining everyone to see whether he was the same personality whom he first saw in the womb. But no one could be equal to or more attractive than the Lord, and therefore he never accepted anyone. But the Lord was constantly with him by such examination, and thus Mahārāja Parikṣit was always engaged in the devotional service of the Lord by remembrance.

—*Bhāg.* 1.12.30, purport





# How Wide is a Vaiṣṇava's Compassion?

WHEN WE THINK OF BECOMING COMPASSIONATE; we imagine ourselves actively reaching out to nondevotees to distribute spiritual understanding whether by offering them books, handing out *prasādam*, or organizing festivals or *harināma* parties by which others can hear the holy name.

But there is more to becoming compassionate than those outward acts of preaching. To understand the inner life of compassion, we have to ask, "How wide is a Vaiṣṇava's compassion?" By understanding the magnitude of the Vaiṣṇava's mission, we can begin to understand at least generally what is taking place in his or her heart. For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda usually states that a Vaiṣṇava's compassion is to be directed toward all living entities. Here is one of many purports that assert this:

Whenever there is disease in any part of the body, the whole body takes care of the ailing part. Similarly, a devotee's oneness is manifested in His compassion for all conditioned souls. *Bhagavad-gītā* (5.18) says, *paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ*: those who are learned see everyone's conditional life equally. Devotees are compassionate to every conditioned soul . . . Because devotees are learned and know that every living entity is part and parcel of the Supreme Lord, they preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness to everyone so that everyone may be happy. If a particular part of the body is diseased, the whole attention of the body goes to that part. Similarly, devotees care for any person who is forgetful of Kṛṣṇa and therefore in material consciousness. The equal vision of the devotee is that he works to get all living entities back home, back to Godhead.

—*Bhāg.* 4.7.53, purport

Such a compassionate vision is so deep that it far surpasses the compassion one might feel toward oneself and one's family members, or even one's own community, nation, or species. One who holds this vision



knows that every living entity is spirit soul, servant of God; such a person wants only to share Kṛṣṇa consciousness with all living beings.

Frankly, the expression of this deepest compassion is beyond us, and although pure Vaiṣṇavas have amazing powers, in their humility, they feel it is beyond them too. We are but tiny servants of God, and we have very little power to accomplish the job. Sometimes we hear devotees say that in more pious times, the government would have helped establish spiritual truth in society; they also tend to think the government should still be helping. But even the government cannot help fulfill the entire scope of the Vaiṣṇava's mission. It is just too big. Vaiṣṇavas have to go to Kṛṣṇa. Going to Kṛṣṇa means approaching Him through prayer. If we want the whole world to be happy in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we will have to pray to Kṛṣṇa to ask Him to bring this about.

Some devotees may think that prayer is the business of *bhajanānandīs*, but all serious *goṣṭhyānandīs* pray. To say that prayer is not the vocation of *goṣṭhyānandīs* is to contradict the example set by our own *ācāryas*. Aside from them, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is full of prayers both for the well-being of the devotees and for the liberation of the nondevotees.

In the Fifth Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Prahāda Mahārāja makes the following prayer: "May there be good fortune throughout the universe, and may all envious persons be pacified. May all living entities become calm by practicing *bhakti-yoga*, for by accepting devotional service they will think of each other's welfare. Therefore let us all engage in the service of the supreme transcendence, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and always remain absorbed in thought of Him." (*Bhāg.* 5.18.9)

This is the Vaiṣṇava's "peace on earth, good will to all men" prayer. In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

Prahāda Mahārāja is a typical Vaiṣṇava. He prays not for himself, but for all living entities—the gentle, the envious and the mischievous. He always thought of the welfare of mischievous persons like his father, Hiranyakaśipu. Prahāda Mahārāja did not ask for anything for himself; rather, he prayed for the Lord to excuse his demoniac father. This is the attitude of a Vaiṣṇava, who always thinks of the welfare of the entire universe.



Vaiṣṇavas desire seemingly impossible things in Kṛṣṇa's service. Prabhupāda based his desire that the whole world become Kṛṣṇa conscious on Lord Caitanya's edict that His name be spread in every town and village. To achieve that, Prabhupāda started the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. But what hope does our tiny movement have in this world, influenced as it is by Kali-yuga? We are not even united among ourselves. How can we hope to conquer the world with love of God? When we think of Prabhupāda's desire and the desire of all compassionate Vaiṣṇavas, we can endeavor to carry the desire out, but ultimately, we are left only with prayer.

Kṛṣṇa responds to the devotees' prayers, even those of His small devotees: "But Kṛṣṇa can see by His ear. As soon as you pray to Kṛṣṇa, immediately He sees you, 'Oh, here is My devotee,' by hearing the sound of your prayer." (Morning walk, November 1, 1975, Nairobi)

There are many examples in the scriptures of devotees who prayed to the Lord for others and who received His mercy. Often, the devotees assure the Lord that they are worthy of His concern because they are fallen and incapable. The more sincerely we express our need to serve Him in our spiritual master's compassionate mission, the more Kṛṣṇa feels the need to respond. "One merely has to become sincere in his purpose, and then the Lord is there to help in every way." (*Bhāg.* 3.13.49, purport)

Whenever the topic of prayer arises, some devotees say, "The books aren't going to get distributed by prayer. Someone has to actually go out and do the work." But it's not necessary to create a dichotomy between prayer and active service. The active work only becomes service when it is based on an internal life of prayer. A Vaiṣṇava's compassion is broad. If we wish to broaden our understanding of the compassionate mission, we will have to become introspective, work for self-realization, and learn to be contemplative. Only then will our practical attempts to help others have any spiritual depth, and only then will our commitment to compassion be solid.



# Praying to Become Compassionate, Because a Dead Man Can't Preach

Like Prahlāda Mahārāja, all pure devotees of the Lord come to this material world with full compassion to deliver the sinful. They undergo all kinds of tribulations, suffering them with tolerance, because that is another qualification of a Vaiṣṇava, who tries to deliver all sinful persons from the hellish conditions of material existence. Vaiṣṇavas are therefore offered the following prayer:

*vāñchā-kalpatarubhyaś ca  
kṛpā-sindhubhya eva ca  
patitānām pāvanebhyo  
vaiṣṇavebhyo namo namaḥ*

The chief concern of a Vaiṣṇava is to deliver the fallen souls.

—*Bhāg.* 4.21.47, purport

WELL, WHAT IF, DESPITE THE FACT THAT WE ASPIRE to become Vaiṣṇavas, our chief concern is *not* to deliver the fallen souls? When we face ourselves honestly, most of us discover that we are almost always absorbed in our own problems. Either that, or we simply want to be left alone. How to bridge the gap between selfishness and compassion?

Compassion is a devotional quality, and we can pray to attain it. Just as we pray for attention in chanting, we can pray to attain devotional qualities. Both the internal awareness that such prayer requires, and the power of the prayer itself, change us. In his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.8.42, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells us how Arjuna became changed by surrendering to the Lord. Arjuna did not want to fight with his relatives just to satisfy his personal desires, but when the Lord spoke *Bhagavad-gītā* to him, he changed his mind and fought the battle as service to Kṛṣṇa. Thus Arjuna became a famous devotee, and attained perfection by practicing devotion in friendship



## Contemplation as Compassion

with Kṛṣṇa. “The fighting was there, the friendship was there, Arjuna was there, and Kṛṣṇa was there, but Arjuna became a different person by devotional service.”

In the same purport, Prabhupāda explains that Kuntī-devī’s prayer was to serve the Lord without diversion. She too made the “same categorical changes in activities.”

This unalloyed devotion is the ultimate goal of life. Our attention is usually diverted to the service of something which is nongodly or not in the program of the Lord. When the program is changed into the service of the Lord, that is to say when the senses are purified in relation with the service of the Lord, it is called pure unalloyed devotional service. *Śrīmatī Kuntidevī wanted that perfection and prayed for it from the Lord.* [Emphasis added]

*Bhakti* is absolute. Therefore, the qualities devotees wish to attain in order to improve their devotion are not material, nor is desiring them something different than desiring to attain pure *bhakti*. Like *bhakti*, which is self-manifest, we can say that compassion is also self-manifest. That is, *bhakti* is bestowed upon us through the mercy of a devotee who carries *bhakti* in his heart. Still, we are free to respond, and actually, we must respond personally in order for the seed to sprout and grow. Seeds planted on rock will not sprout. Similarly, although we can associate with compassionate preachers, we will still have to grow the seed of compassion within ourselves. How will we do that? We can only beg Kṛṣṇa for His mercy: “O Kṛṣṇa, please let me have compassion. Let my Kṛṣṇa consciousness expand into caring for others. You are the director of my heart, and it is You who determine my capacity to be compassionate. Please give me Your mercy so that I may participate in the Vaiṣṇava’s compassionate mission.”



# Trusting Kṛṣṇa

ALL DEVOTEES WILL AGREE THAT KṚṢṆA RESPONDS with compassion when a devotee prays. What is it, then, that blocks us from being aware of His response? This question has a simple answer. We cannot hear Kṛṣṇa because we have already decided what He should say. When we pray for ourselves we are often reluctant to face the actual depth of our deficiencies and what it will take to fill them. When we pray for others, we are usually sure we know what is best for them. When our hope for ourselves or others is not fulfilled, we conclude that Kṛṣṇa did not respond to our entreaty.

Therefore, prayer requires faith. It also requires knowledge. We need to understand that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme controller, and we need to trust that He has our best interests in mind. Gajendra prays to Lord Viṣṇu, “Since an animal such as I has surrendered unto You . . . certainly You will release me from this dangerous position. Indeed, being extremely merciful, You incessantly try to deliver me.” (*Bhāg.* 8.3.17)

In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasizes Kṛṣṇa’s power by quoting *Bhagavad-gītā* 10.42: “But what need is there, Arjuna, for all this detailed knowledge? With a single fragment of Myself I pervade and support this universe.” Kṛṣṇa is our very origin; no one is superior to Him. Therefore, only Kṛṣṇa can deliver us from this material existence. “Indeed, He is always trying to deliver us. . . . He is within our hearts and is not at all inattentive. His only aim is to deliver us from material life. It is not that He becomes attentive to us only when we offer prayers to Him. Even before we offer our prayers, He incessantly tries to deliver us. He is never lazy in regard to our deliverance.” Śrīla Prabhupāda goes on to say that it is we who constantly refuse to accept His instructions. “Nonetheless, He has not become angry. Therefore He is described here as *bhūri-karūṇāya*, unlimitedly merciful in delivering us from this miserable material condition of life and taking us back home, back to Godhead.”

When we pray to Kṛṣṇa, therefore, we should not present Him with the solutions to the questions we may be asking. Rather, we should present



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ourselves as dependent on His mercy. Kṛṣṇa's mercy is often revealed to us in ways we did not expect. Kṛṣṇa can see our innermost hearts. Because He is the Supersoul, He knows past, present, and future. He knows what is best for our overall development in devotional service.

In practical terms, if we pray, "Please tell me what direction to take," we can trust that the answer will come. It may come in a gentle way, in the form of a growing conviction that we should do one thing over another, or it may come in a less gentle way. We may find ourselves "forced" to move in a particular direction despite our natural resistance to it. Whatever happens is Kṛṣṇa's will, and even the willingness to acknowledge that can become a form of prayer. Such consciousness leads to a steady communion with God.

Prayer, therefore, can be defined as nondifferent from *bhakti*. Although *vandanam* is only one of the nine limbs of devotional service, each limb is absolute and as powerful as practicing all of the nine limbs together. Prayer is a flexible concept. It is the state of Kṛṣṇa consciousness behind any activity we perform that helps us break through into emotion for Kṛṣṇa. It is the activity that carries us past the mechanical into the feeling.

The one thing that blocks us from this more intense Kṛṣṇa awareness is our unwillingness to see Kṛṣṇa as ever-present and all-pervading in our lives and in our world. If we are open to Kṛṣṇa's presence in our creativity and in nature, for example, we will feel grateful to Him for His mercy. We will be able to see His compassionate response to our prayers, and we will give up our narrow-mindedness in deciding how we expected Him to act on our behalf. We will grow past our stereotypes of who Kṛṣṇa is, and we will learn to see Him as a person. When we begin to accomplish that, we will not fail to see His compassionate nature directed toward us and all other beings.

Prayer, like attraction, should be both flowing and incessant. Queen Kuntī prayed that her attraction to the Lord could flow like a river toward His lotus feet. In a 1973 lecture given in Los Angeles, Śrīla Prabhupāda cites her prayer: "As the river flows down towards the seas, similarly my attraction will go down incessantly to touch Your lotus feet like the Ganges." The *Bhāgavatam* states that Kṛṣṇa is *śaranya*, "the only worthy personality to whom one can fully surrender . . ." (*Bhāg.* 3.25.11, purport) We can trust Him.



# *Vertical and Horizontal Relationships in Prayer: The Root of Prayerful Compassion*

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WHEN WE PRAY, WE GENERALLY THINK OF OURSELVES as having a vertical relationship with Kṛṣṇa. That is, we have a direct relationship between ourselves and Kṛṣṇa (through guru). Kṛṣṇa reaches down to us while we reach up to meet Him. “But those who worship Me, giving up all their activities unto Me and being devoted to Me without deviation, engaged in devotional service and always meditating upon Me, having fixed their minds upon Me, O son of Pṛthā—for them I am the swift deliverer from the ocean of birth and death.” (Bg. 12.6–7) In these verses, both Kṛṣṇa and the living entity are working to meet one another.

In a vertical prayer relationship, a devotee expresses to Kṛṣṇa the desires of his heart, both for himself and for others. We can see many examples of the vertical relationship in the scriptures. Lord Brahmā appeals to the Lord for His mercy in a prayer in the Tenth Canto:

Therefore, O infallible Lord, kindly excuse my offenses. I have taken birth in the mode of passion and am therefore simply foolish, presuming myself a controller independent of Your Lordship. My eyes are blinded by the darkness of ignorance, which causes me to think of myself as the unborn creator of the universe. But please consider that I am Your servant and therefore worthy of Your compassion.

—*Bhāg.* 10.14.10

In another prayer, Prahāda Mahārāja appeals to the Lord to both relieve him of material desires and to show compassion to his father:

O my Lord, best of the givers of benediction, if You at all want to bestow a desirable benediction upon me, then I pray from Your Lordship that within the core of my heart there be no material desires. . . . Prahāda Mahārāja said: O Supreme Lord, because You are so merciful



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to the fallen souls, I ask You for only one benediction. I know that my father, at the time of his death, had already been purified by Your glance upon him, but because of his ignorance of Your beautiful power and supremacy, he was unnecessarily angry at You, falsely thinking that You were the killer of his brother. Thus he directly blasphemed Your Lordship, the spiritual master of all living beings, and committed heavily sinful activities directed against me, Your devotee. I wish that he be excused for these sinful activities.

—*Bhāg.* 7.10.7, 15–17

Kṛṣṇa responds to both appeals for our own upliftment in devotional service and the prayers we make for others. In his purport to *Bhāgavatam* 7.9.52, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “The Supreme Personality of Godhead said in effect: I fulfill the desires of everyone. Since you are My devotee, whatever you want for yourself will naturally be given, but if you pray for anyone else, that prayer also will be fulfilled.” Because Kṛṣṇa fulfills the devotee’s prayers for the well-being of others, prayer can be an act of compassion.

Aside from contemplative compassion, a devotee relates in a horizontal way through prayer. That is, the devotee takes his own hope for the spiritual well-being of others and tries to relate to others through sharing his own Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, prayer is not only a mystical exchange between the devotee and Kṛṣṇa, but it becomes a live exchange between the devotee and other beings.

In his teachings, Śrīla Prabhupāda seemed to encourage this blend of vertical and horizontal, of prayerful contemplation and outward preaching. Lord Caitanya too seemed to encourage this blend. In His instructions to Vāsudeva Vipra, the leper who, out of compassion, picked up the worms that were falling from his body and replaced them so that they would not be inconvenienced, He asks him to preach. In his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya* 7.148, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

Although Vāsudeva Vipra was a leper and had suffered greatly, still, after Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu cured him He instructed him to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Indeed, the only return the Lord wanted was that Vāsudeva preach the instructions of Kṛṣṇa and liberate all human beings. That is the process of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Each and every member of this Society was rescued



from a very abominable condition, but now they are engaged in preaching the cult of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They are not only cured of the disease called materialism but are also living a very happy life. Everyone accepts them as great devotees of Kṛṣṇa, and their qualities are manifest in their very faces. If one wants to be recognized as a devotee by Kṛṣṇa, he should take to preaching work, following the advice of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Then one will undoubtedly attain the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, without delay.

Similarly, the Six Gosvāmīs are described as both preachers and mendicants:

Because of their compassion for the poor fallen souls, the six Gosvāmīs gave up their exalted positions as ministers and took vows as mendicants. Thus minimizing their bodily wants as far as possible, they each accepted only a loincloth and a begging bowl. Thus they remained in Vṛndāvana to execute the orders of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu by compiling and publishing various Vaiṣṇava literatures.

—*Bhāg.* 5.1.26, purport

This blend of the vertical with the horizontal has been stated well in a book by Laurence Freeman on Christian mantra meditation:

We are led into the wonder of creation at each of its levels, and the great wonder is that we are empowered to allow our lives to blend with the lives of others, to enter into relationship, to love. The real test of progress on the path of meditation is not growth in abstract conceptual knowledge, which depends on the kind of mind one has, but growth in charity, which is the capacity to love. This is why the one essential command that Jesus gave us is to love one another. Jesus, the supreme Master and Teacher of love, tells us that love will lead us to all Wisdom.

—*Light Within: The Inner Path of Meditation*, p. 60

Prayer and the proactive expression of compassion are therefore not separate entities. Devotees are meant to blend them into a life of prayer. Such a life would be neither devoid of contemplation nor of practical service to others. Śrīla Prabhupāda has defined that service as “preaching.”



## Prayer as the Groundwork of Preaching

PRAYER IS A MYSTERIOUS PRACTICE, and how a person prays is private, but prayer is very much the vocation of a *goṣṭhyānandī*. Every serious preacher knows just how dependent he or she is on Kṛṣṇa. Each serious preacher knows his or her own inability to change anything or anyone in this world. Therefore, the groundwork of preaching is prayer.

I have already quoted Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's statement, "The best *goṣṭhyānandī* is a *bhajanānandī* who preaches." In ISKCON, we generally consider "*bhajanānandī*" a dirty word. Of course, we always qualify it, because Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābāji was a *bhajanānandī*. But we tend to think of a *bhajanānandī* as someone who shirks the work Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us. We consider such a person inferior, and any great exceptions to that rule like a token ethnic member of an otherwise all-white group. But Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī seems to indicate in his statement that the *bhajanānandī*'s practice is also part of the *goṣṭhyānandī*'s mission.

What does this mean practically? It means that when a praying *goṣṭhyānandī* stands up to preach, he does not speak mere platitudes, or things he learned in a manual on how to win friends and influence people. It's not that when he is finished speaking, the members of the audience walk away feeling hollow. Rather, he speaks from realization. Realization comes from direct association with guru and Kṛṣṇa in the service mood, and one of the main ways a Vaiṣṇava associates with guru and Kṛṣṇa is by conversing with them, if not "in person," then in prayer.

Prayer is internal meditation. When a preacher practices internal meditation, he will have something to share when he preaches. A praying *goṣṭhyānandī* does not remain on the mountaintop but sacrifices some of that communing time to give Kṛṣṇa consciousness to others.

A praying *goṣṭhyānandī*, however, does not sacrifice *all* of his mountaintop time to preach. He balances the two states of meditation and sharing. He meditates so that he will have something real to give, and he



preaches to express the Kṛṣṇa conscious compassion he is gaining while meditating. They are not separate processes. Therefore, we can say that a real *bhajanānandī* does preach.

A Vaiṣṇava's life is dedicated to the benefit of others. Just as a father sacrifices his comforts out of affection for his son, saintly persons sacrifice bodily comforts for the benefit of human society. In this connection, it is said about the Six Gosvāmīs:

These Gosvāmīs left their very comfortable lives as ministers, zamindars and learned scholars and joined Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's movement, just to show mercy to the fallen souls of the world (*dinagaṇeśakau karuṇayā*). Accepting very humble lives as mendicants, wearing no more than loincloths and torn quilts (*kaupīna-kantha*), they lived in Vṛndāvana and followed Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's order to excavate Vṛndāvana's lost glories.

Similarly, everyone else with a materially comfortable condition in this world should join the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement to elevate the fallen souls. . . . One should join the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, following the examples of such great personalities as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the six Gosvāmīs and, before them, the great sage Dadhici. Instead of wasting one's life for temporary bodily comforts, one should always be prepared to give up one's life for better causes. After all, the body will be destroyed. Therefore one should sacrifice it for the glory of distributing religious principles throughout the world.

—Bhāg. 6.10.8, purport

Śrīla Prabhupāda indicates here that the Six Gosvāmīs were compassionate. They showed their compassion by retiring from their opulent lives, and both writing books and excavating the lost holy sites. Because of their compassion, they wore only *kaupīns* and torn quilts, and lived under a different tree each night.

When we think of the Six Gosvāmīs, however, we think more of them as *rasācāryas* than as preachers. In his song glorifying the Six Gosvāmīs, Śrīnivāsācārya tells us that the Gosvāmīs were always merged in *gopī-bhāva*. However, their absorption in advanced Kṛṣṇa consciousness was not something separate from their desire to rescue conditioned souls. The Six



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Gosvāmīs wanted others to taste *bhakti*; their absorption in *gopi-bhāva* only fueled their compassion. Out of compassion, they wrote thousands of prayers, offered thousands of obeisances daily, and chanted unlimited rounds. They cried out to Kṛṣṇa in separation and lived both the external life of the *sādhaka* and the internal life of the *siddha*. The Gosvāmīs' *van-danam* appeared in their writings. Whatever they recorded can now be appreciated by all the devotees coming after them.

Compassionate prayer is a broad concept, and it means more than the recitation of standard prayers. Vaiṣṇava prayer is the begging for the heart of *bhakti* and then the willingness to let that flow move out toward others in some form or other. The Gosvāmīs exemplified this mood. We cannot imitate them, of course, but we should not exclude their example from the example or instructions that Śrīla Prabhupāda gave. Prayer and the development of one's internal Kṛṣṇa conscious realization—even up to the ultimate understanding—is part of the groundwork of the preacher's life.

## Intercessionary Prayer

**W**HAT IS A PREACHER? A PREACHER IS ONE WHO acts as a medium for Kṛṣṇa to the conditioned souls. In a lecture delivered in London on August 23, 1973, Śrīla Prabhupāda acknowledged the difficulty of preaching. "We are trying, even our Kṛṣṇa consciousness mission . . . to awaken. Still they are so unfortunate they cannot give up sense gratification. So unfortunate. Condemned, unfortunate. Repeatedly we are spending our gallons of blood—'Don't do this'—still they are doing. Cannot give up even sleeping. So condemned. . . . So it is very difficult with these rascals. Very, very difficult." Any devotee who, despite the difficulty, tries to reclaim conditioned souls from absorption in matter is interceding on their behalf.

According to the dictionary, the word *intercede* has two meanings: "to interpose on behalf of someone, as by pleading or petition," and, "to attempt to reconcile differences between two people or groups; to mediate." We know from *Mādhurya-kādamini* that the position of the intercessionary is granted to the *bhakta*, and it is the *bhakta*'s role to determine who shall receive *bhakti* and who shall not. And it is not just any *bhakta* who makes this determination; it is the *madhyama-bhakta* or one who is acting as a *madhyama-bhakta*. *Mādhurya-kādamini* begins by explaining the causeless nature of *bhakti*:

If one proposes that the cause of *bhakti* is . . . the Lord's unqualified mercy . . . if this mercy is causeless, however, one should observe the Lord giving *bhakti* equally everywhere. Since this is not seen, it would then imply the fault of partiality (*vaiṣaṁya*) on the part of the Lord. . . . The Lord, being subservient to His devotee (*sva-bhakta-vaśyatā*), lets His mercy follow the mercy of His devotee. . . . one should understand the meaning of the word *atibhāgyena* (extreme good fortune) as attaining the mercy of the devotee (*bhakta-kāruṇya*) . . . One shouldn't consider it impossible for the devotee to bestow mercy first without awaiting the order of the Lord. Accepting subservience to His devotee, the Lord grants him the power to bestow the Lord's own mercy . . . Although the Lord as *paramātmā* oversees the affairs of the *jīva*'s external senses, the



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result of his past activities, He gives special mercy to His devotees . . . Kṛṣṇa Himself speaks of His *prasāda*, or mercy, as the means to attain supreme peace and His eternal abode. This *prasāda* takes the form of the Lord giving His devotee the power to confer the Lord's own *kṛpā-śakti* or mercy.

—*Mādhurya-kādambini*, pp. 3-4

Later in the chapter it is explained that it is not a fault for the *madhyama-bhakta* to be partial. Rather, partiality is the natural characteristic of one acting on the *madhyama-bhakta* platform. The characteristics of a *madhyama-bhakta* are listed as follows: *prema-maitrī-kṛpopekṣā yaḥ karoti sa madhyamaḥ*: he shows love for the Lord, friendship toward the devotees, mercy to the innocent, and disregard toward the hostile.

Whether the *bhakta* is an active, frontline preacher or a more reclusive *sādhū*, however, all *bhaktas* wish to intercede with Kṛṣṇa for the welfare of others. The frontline preacher may pray, "Please, Lord, out of all these temples we have opened, all these programs we have held, all these books we have distributed, please allow just one person to become a pure devotee." A recluse may pray, "What good is my austerity? What good is my solitude unless I pray to deliver the souls of Kali-yuga?" The *Bhāgavatam* states about the compassionate Vaiṣṇava, "Such devotees of the Lord are honored equally with the Lord because they are engaged in the most confidential service of the Lord, for they deliver out of the material world the fallen souls whom the Lord wants to return home, back to Godhead." (*Bhāg.* 1.1.15, purport)

We have already stated that prayer is the groundwork of preaching. Without prayer, without a developed inner life, preaching is often activity without depth. Therefore, while devotees will pray to Kṛṣṇa for their own advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, they will also most certainly pray for the fallen souls. This is called intercessionary prayer.

The scriptures are full of examples of intercessionary prayer. The most famous example, of course, is Prahlāda Mahārāja, who asked Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva to pardon his father despite his offenses, and who also asked Him to liberate the fools and rascals even at the expense of his own liberation. In *caitanya-līlā*, Vāsudeva Datta prayed to Lord Caitanya to allow him to take the karma of all *jīvas* on himself so that they could return to



the spiritual world. The sages at Naimiṣāranya had actually begun their sacrifice as an act of intercession for all those taking birth in Kali-yuga.

The great sages are always anxious to do good to the people in general, and as such the sages headed by Śaunaka and others assembled at this holy place of Naimiṣāranya with a program of performing a great and continuous chain of sacrificial ceremonies. Forgetful men do not know the right path for peace and prosperity. However, the sages know it well, and therefore for the good of all men they are always anxious to perform acts which may bring about peace in the world. They are sincere friends to all living entities, and at the risk of great personal inconvenience they are always engaged in the service of the Lord for the good of all people.

—*Bhāg.* 1.1.4, purport

Advaita Ācārya presented another example of the *bhakta* desiring to intercede through prayer on behalf of the lost people of his age. About Advaita Ācārya, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “Śrī Advaita Prabhu was the chief cause for the advent of the Lord. When Advaita Prabhu saw that the total human society was full of materialistic activities and devoid of devotional service, which alone could save mankind from the threefold miseries of material existence, He, out of His causeless compassion for the age-worn human society, prayed fervently for the incarnation of the Lord and continually worshiped the Lord with water of the Ganges and leaves of the holy *tulasī* tree.” (*Bhāg.*, Introduction, p. 12)

And of course, the greatest example we know of a devotee praying to Kṛṣṇa to intercede on behalf of the *mlecchas* is Śrīla Prabhupāda. Along with the prayer he offered to Kṛṣṇa at the Boston pier upon his arrival in the United States (“*Mārkiṇe Bhāgavata-dharma*”<sup>\*</sup>), Prabhupāda wrote another prayer entitled, “*Bhagavān Kṛṣṇera Pāda-Padme Prārthanā*.” This prayer was written on the thirty-second day of his journey across the Atlantic Ocean, aboard the *Jaladuta*. In this prayer, Prabhupāda reveals his vision of his spiritual master’s mission, then prays for the strength to carry it out:

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\*To read the text of this prayer, please refer to p. 32–33 of this book.



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... Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, who is very dear to Lord Gaurāṅga [Lord Caitanya] the son of mother Śacī, is unparalleled in his service to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He is that great, saintly spiritual master who bestows intense devotion to Kṛṣṇa at different places throughout the world.

By his strong desire, the holy name of Lord Gaurāṅga will spread throughout all the countries of the Western world. In all the cities, towns, and villages on the earth, from all the oceans, seas, rivers, and streams, everyone will chant the holy name of Kṛṣṇa.

As the vast mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu conquers all directions, a flood of transcendental ecstasy will certainly cover the land. When all the sinful, miserable living entities become happy, the Vaiṣṇavas' desire is then fulfilled.

Although my Guru Mahārāja ordered me to accomplish this mission, I am not worthy or fit to do it. I am very fallen and insignificant. Therefore, O Lord, now I am begging for Your mercy so that I may become worthy, for You are the wisest and most experienced of all. . . .

Today that remembrance of You came to me in a very nice way. Because I have a great longing I called to You. I am Your eternal servant, and therefore I desire Your association so much. O Lord Kṛṣṇa, except for You there is no means of success.

Śrīla Prabhupāda prayed on other occasions of which we know about also. For example, upon installing Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Deities in Australia, he asked the Deities to please take care of Themselves. He was leaving Them in the land of the *mlecchas* and could not take personal responsibility for Their care. Why, then, did he install the Deities? Because he knew that the Deities' presence would uplift the people of Sydney and help them develop Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The *Bhāgavatam* also contains prayers of intercession. Lord Brahmā, in his prayers for creative energy, states: "O my Lord, today, after many, many years of penance, I have come to know about You. Oh, how unfortunate the embodied living entities are that they are unable to know Your personality! My Lord, You are the only knowable object because there is



nothing supreme beyond You. If there is anything supposedly superior to You, it is not the Absolute. You exist as the Supreme by exhibiting the creative energy of matter.” (*Bhāg.* 3.9.1) He goes on to praise Kṛṣṇa for the superiority of His spiritual form, then to compare those who “smell the aroma of Your lotus feet, carried by the air of Vedic sound through the holes of their ears” (*Bhāg.* 3.9.5) and those who are lost in the material world. While the pure devotees engage in devotional service, the conditioned souls are both always embarrassed by material anxiety and always afraid. Those who do not hear and chant about God enjoy sense gratification for a short time only. “O great actor, my Lord, all these poor creatures are constantly perplexed by hunger, thirst, severe cold, secretion and bile, attacked by coughing winter, blasting summer, rains and many other disturbing elements, and overwhelmed by strong sex urges and indefatigable anger. I take pity on them, and I am very much aggrieved for them.” (*Bhāg.* 3.9.8)

Brahmā goes on to praise the Lord as the solution to all material problems: He is the root of the universe and all the planetary systems it contains, He is eternal time, by which the struggle for existence is cut to pieces, and it is by His pastimes that the material world—meant for the ultimate benefit of those in bound consciousness—comes into existence and is finally destroyed. In a purport in this section, Śrīla Prabhupāda sums up both the reason for conditioned life and the Vaiṣṇavas’ compassion toward the fallen:

The next question is why people are against such auspicious activities as chanting and hearing the glories and pastimes of the Lord, which can bring total freedom from the cares and anxieties of material existence. The only answer to this question is that they are unfortunate because of supernatural control due to their offensive activities performed simply for the sake of sense gratification. The Lord’s pure devotees, however, take compassion upon such unfortunate persons and, in a missionary spirit, try to persuade them into the line of devotional service. Only by the grace of pure devotees can such unfortunate men be elevated to the position of transcendental service.

—*Bhāg.* 3.9.7, purport



## Contemplation as Compassion

The expression of such compassion begins with the type of intercessionary prayer spoken by Brahmā and so many of our *ācāryas*, which recognizes the devotee's helplessness in the face of ignorance and his dependence on Kṛṣṇa in the preaching mission. In this case, it is Brahmā's service to humanity to become the secondary creator of the universe. He is implementing Kṛṣṇa's own plan to rescue the fallen souls. Still, he prays to the Lord both for the strength to carry out his mission and for His mercy on the conditioned souls.

The ultimate intercessionary in our line is Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. "Therefore, instead of offering obeisances to Kṛṣṇa directly, devotees offer obeisances to His compassionate nature. Actually, because Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, it is very difficult to approach Him. But the devotees, taking advantage of His compassionate nature, which is represented by Rādhārāṇī, always pray to Rādhārāṇī for Kṛṣṇa's compassion." (NOD, p. 176) Thus we can pray not only to Kṛṣṇa for the welfare of others but to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, who being the personification of compassion, will recommend the *jīva* to Kṛṣṇa and implore His mercy upon that soul.



# *Intercessionary Prayer and the Human Quality*

IN OTHER SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS, WE HEAR OF SAINTS who dedicate their lives to praying for the material and spiritual welfare of others, using themselves as spiritual conduits for God's mercy to descend into the world. In ISKCON, we usually consider such a vocation as the realm of the *bhajanānandīs*, and we imply that anyone following that line is more selfish than those of us who actively preach.

My mother first taught me to pray for others, but Śrīla Prabhupāda taught me what to pray *for*. There is something powerful about such intercessionary prayer. Of course, such prayer has been mocked in much of modern world literature; people have become cynical when they do not see the prayed-for benefit appearing. Gorky's grandmother was a peasant and quite poor, but every night she would pray for her family members. "... and Lord, please don't forget that so-and-so needs a pair of boots. Don't forget Sergey's eyes are going bad. Just see that Sergey doesn't go blind." Gorky was an atheist. He said he became an atheist because he saw that none of the people for whom his grandmother prayed were ever given their boon.

Aside from the possible cynicism that may arise when we misunderstand Kṛṣṇa's will, intercessionary prayer broadens our lives. Rather than being selfish, it helps us extend our concern beyond ourselves, to others. Intercessionary prayer is a way to soften our hearts.

I remember years ago giving a lecture at the "O" Street temple in Washington, D.C. Someone asked, "Do you have anything like the Bodhisattva concept in your religion?" A Bodhisattva is a Buddhist who takes vows to remain in the material world until all other living beings are liberated. Prahlaḍa Mahārāja expresses such a mood when he states, "My dear Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva, I see that there are many saintly persons indeed, but they are interested only in their own deliverance. Not caring for the big cities and towns, they go to the Himalayas or the forest to meditate with vows of silence [*mauna-vrata*]. They are not interested in delivering



others. As for me, however, I do not wish to be liberated alone, leaving aside all these poor fools and rascals. I know that without Kṛṣṇa consciousness, without taking shelter of Your lotus feet, one cannot be happy. Therefore I wish to bring them back to shelter at Your lotus feet.” (*Bhāg.* 7.9.44) We are not always capable of liberating all the fools and rascals, but we are capable of praying for them.

Of course, a devotee prays not so much for others’ material well-being but for their spiritual emancipation. He prays for the people he knows and for the people he doesn’t. When he hears of the tragedies in Kosovo or Rwanda, he prays that those souls can become free not only of their present physical distress but of the bodily concept that created it. Perhaps to some devotees, intercessionary prayer sounds naive or childish, but when it is heartfelt, it is pleasing to Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa responds.

Intercessionary prayer is made in a mood of helplessness. “I am weak, O Lord, and You are strong. Only You can save the situation.” Advaita Ācārya made such a prayer. Although Advaita Ācārya was a powerful devotee, still, out of helplessness in the face of the increase in atheism, He prayed to the Lord to incarnate.

Feeling helpless in the face of others’ suffering helps us feel human. Life is not just about absolute ideals but the willingness to live them in the real world. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is sometimes called the yoga of emotion. Although Śrīla Prabhupāda taught us that chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is the ultimate prayer, we will not be able to chant purely until we learn to need the Lord’s mercy. We need to learn to meld the absolutes we hold to with the human quality, because how can we chant Hare Kṛṣṇa purely without developing the human quality that brings our chanting to life? Intercessionary prayer is an easy way to humanize our devotional service.

When I was writing *Memories*, I drew ideas from *The Anatomy of Memory*, by James McConkey. In that book was a short, autobiographical story written by Dostoevsky. The story was written while Dostoevsky was in prison, about a memory he had of the prisoners celebrating Christmas Day by getting drunk and becoming violent. He decided to stay in his bed and away from the drunken revelry. Dostoevsky paints a picture of men at their most vicious. Eventually, he drifts off to sleep and has a dream-memory of himself as a young boy, suddenly terrified while walking through the forest. Someone unseen had just shouted, “There’s a wolf. The young Dostoevsky



ran out of the forest and saw a peasant plowing his field. The peasant, Marey, was a kindhearted man, and he asked the boy, "What are you afraid of?" He drew the sign of the cross over the boy, then assured him that there was nothing to fear. Then Marey sent him home. As Dostoevsky walked down the road, he turned to wave to the peasant, then ran the rest of the way home. Marey was rough and earthy, but a pious man, and somehow, in that setting of bestiality and drunkenness, Dostoevsky was able to remember Marey's moment of compassionate concern for Dostoevsky's younger self. Compassion is what will save our society. In this case, the peasant's humanity saved the boy not only at the time but later when he was in prison. We too need to be able to assure the "boy" that there is nothing to fear—because the soul can neither be dried nor burned nor withered by the wind—but we need to do it with humanity.



## Prayer Should Break Your Heart

**S**TILL, DEVOTEES MAY WONDER HOW PRAYER can help us develop compassion. We understand that need to pray for Kṛṣṇa's mercy in order to preach; we are weak and He is strong. We also understand how by accepting our dependent position, we can also develop enough humility to *need* to pray, which in turn makes us more human. But does prayer actually develop the compassionate heart?

I know so little about prayer, although I am attracted to praying. I can say this, however: real prayer should break our hearts. It should bring us into contact with God. If we were able to pray intently, we would feel as if we were sweating blood; we would feel the outpouring of our hearts; we would feel cleansed. We may even, if Kṛṣṇa desires, feel His response.

We have the best prayer in the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, but that does not mean that we pray it attentively. Prayer is reciting Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa with our entire attention; it is speaking to Kṛṣṇa, begging Him for service, from our innermost core. If we pray while we read scripture, we will listen wholly to Kṛṣṇa as He speaks to us through the verses and our spiritual master's purports. Prayer is meditation.

If we get to the heart in prayer, we will also find the soul's natural compassion. I cannot spell out how that happens, but as we advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, devotional qualities also become established in our character. Part of it is the purification of our intent. We should not be going to pray out of a neurotic desire to avoid others. We should pray simply to help ourselves come to a more loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and to help others do the same. Thomas Merton expressed this well in his own life. He craved to enter the solitude of prayer, not to escape the world but to bring the world into his solitude. He wanted to somehow bring the world's suffering with him, and to pray to the only person who could actually help. Although active preaching is important, it is in prayer where we can recollect ourselves and touch the nature of universal suffering. That is, we can maintain a strong, spiritual perspective on our own preaching. We can

understand how all souls have separated themselves from God, and the real need to help them return.

This perspective, along with the constant reminder of our own tinniness that prayer brings and the actual heart-softening nature of prayer, allows us to access a deeper level of compassion. We should not shy away from prayer as if it were something only non-preachers do. Even if all we appear to accomplish in a life of prayer is to be a little bit kinder to the living entities around us, that is no small feat.



# *The Responsibility to Lead a Life of Prayer*

THE TOPIC OF PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION is the pivot point of this book, because the devotional life is meant to be prayerful. I mean, even when devotees are not expressly praying to Kṛṣṇa, they should be living their lives with a sense of dependence on and remembrance of Him. That takes mental concentration. At the end of Brahmā's prayers for creative energy, Maitreya tells Vidura, "O Vidura, after observing the source of his appearance, namely the Personality of Godhead, Brahmā prayed for His mercy as far as his mind and words would permit him. Thus having prayed, he became silent, as if tired from his activities of penance, knowledge and mental concentration." (*Bhāg.* 3.9.26) Leading a prayerful life requires that we regularly contemplate truth. For the *vaidhi-bhakta*, that's hard work.

One who leads a contemplative life finds that all his activities are prayer, if not explicitly stated, then implicitly lived. Prayer draws us into Kṛṣṇa's presence, and as we feel our dependence upon Him, we find ourselves wanting to do all our activities for His pleasure. Therefore, a contemplative Kṛṣṇa conscious life is itself a form of preaching, because others will see the quality in our activities and know, "This was done by a Hare Kṛṣṇa." That includes everything from how we engage in family life to the greatest preaching endeavors.

Therefore, the topic of compassion is not complete without a discussion of prayer. A contemplative life also allows us to see not just our differences but our similarities with the nondevotees—to see our *anarthas* and especially our selfishness. Seeing those parts of ourselves will allow us to become humble enough to pray. Somehow, we have to see in our successes and failures an understanding of the difference between material and spiritual life, and our need to be rescued from matter. We can then understand that all other souls ultimately desire the same freedom from pain, and we can pray for that. When we see ourselves honestly and learn to feel empathy for others because of it, we will be free of the "differential outlook" that



leads to hardheartedness. The “differential outlook” is defined as seeing other living entities according to their physical designations rather than as souls in need of Kṛṣṇa. The *Bhāgavatam* states, “As the blazing fire of death, I cause great fear to whoever makes the least discrimination between himself and other living entities because of a differential outlook.” (*Bhāg.* 3.29.26) It takes prayer to develop this vision.

Prayer, then, also allows us to understand how best to help others. Even as the compassionate urge awakens within us, we need to understand how best to respond to it for the benefit of others. That takes intelligence, and such intelligence is granted by Kṛṣṇa.

Intelligence, knowledge, freedom from doubt and delusion, forgiveness, truthfulness, control of the senses, control of the mind, happiness and distress, birth, death, fear, fearlessness, nonviolence, equanimity, satisfaction, austerity, charity, fame and infamy—all these various qualities of living beings are created by Me alone.

—Bg. 10.4–5

There are many places in his writings where Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that our problem is that we are not aware of our dependence for all these qualities on Kṛṣṇa. We try to be the proprietor. Through prayer, we can face the truth of our own poverty and see Kṛṣṇa as the source of everything we have and everything we wish to become.

When we speak about compassion toward others, we want to know what it is we have to do to help them. If we claim that their activities can become part of their Kṛṣṇa conscious lives—their work, their art, their rearing of children, whatever—we have to see how it will lead them deeper into Kṛṣṇa’s service. We also have to be in touch with how our own work and life activities have been transformed into service. Again, that takes contemplation. It is not enough to run through our lives passionately without ever stopping to think of these implications. “Every learned man knows very well that attachment for the material is the greatest entanglement of the spirit soul. But that same attachment, when applied to the self-realized devotees, opens the door of liberation.” (*Bhāg.* 3.25.20)

To share Kṛṣṇa consciousness with others, we first have to be convinced within ourselves that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the highest benediction



they can receive. We have to become actual *sādhū*. In his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.25.20, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

Here it is recommended that attachment should be transferred to the self-realized devotees, the *sādhū*. And who is a *sādhū*? A *sādhū* is not just an ordinary man with a saffron robe or long beard. A *sādhū* is described in *Bhagavad-gītā* as one who unflinchingly engages in devotional service. Even though one is found not to be following the strict rules and regulations of devotional service, if one simply has unflinching faith in Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Person, he is understood to be a *sādhū*. . . . A *sādhū* is a strict follower of devotional service. It is recommended here that if one at all wants to realize Brahman, or spiritual perfection, his attachment should be transferred to the *sādhū*, or devotee. Lord Caitanya also confirmed this. . . . simply by a moment's association with a *sādhū*, one can attain perfection.

. . . Attachment to a devotee is attachment to the service of the Lord because if one associates with a *sādhū*, the result will be that the *sādhū* will teach him how to become a devotee, a worshiper and a sincere servitor of the Lord. These are the gifts of a *sādhū*. If we want to associate with a *sādhū*, we cannot expect him to give us instructions on how to improve our material condition, but he will give us instructions on how to cut the knot of the contamination of material attraction and how to elevate ourselves in devotional service. . . . Kapila Muni first of all instructs that the path of liberation begins with such association.

Becoming a *sādhū* means attentively chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, the best form of prayer. Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated in a number of places that chanting should take precedence over all other forms of devotional service. If we chant prayerfully, our hearts will become cleansed; if our hearts are cleansed, we will reflect purity to others and they will become attracted to Kṛṣṇa. To preach, we must have the foundation of identifying ourselves as devotees, and that requires the serious practice of *sādhana-bhakti*.

Beyond the outreach endeavor, prayer is an act of spiritual survival. There are many things that Śrīla Prabhupāda asked us to do, many of which we failed at. It is our responsibility as devotees and preachers to take the time to face both his expectations and our failure to meet them.

We should not shy away from this kind of contemplation. For many devotees, it has become an act of survival to spend some inward time in prayer, praying to be given another chance, praying to come up to our spiritual master's expectations, praying that his mission will not be destroyed. Such prayer is never selfish. Prayer allows us to actively remember Kṛṣṇa.

A pure devotee is actually learned because he knows his constitutional position, he knows the position of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and he knows the relationship between the living entity and the Supreme Lord. Thus he has full spiritual knowledge and is automatically liberated (*brahma-bhūtaḥ*). He can therefore see everyone on the spiritual platform. He can comprehend the happiness and distress of all living entities. He understands that what is happiness to him is also happiness to others and that what is distress to him is distressing for others. Therefore he is sympathetic to everyone. As Prahlaḍa Mahārāja said . . . People suffer from material distress because they are not attached to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. A pure devotee's chief concern, therefore, is to raise the ignorant mass of people to the sense of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

—*Bhāg.* 9.4.66, purport

Raising those “ignorant living entities” includes raising ourselves.



# 5

## *Kṛṣṇa as the Object of Compassion*

*Dayā-vīra*: “When on account of love and devotional service for the Lord there is special valorous enthusiasm, the resultant activities are called chivalrous. These chivalrous activities can be manifested in the acts of mock-fighting, giving charity, showing mercy and executing religious principles. . . . By showing extraordinary mercy one is called *dayā-vīra*. . . . In all such . . . activities, Kṛṣṇa is the object.

—NOD Chapter 46, p. 366–67

## Object of Commission

The Commission is organized to study and report on the conditions of the people of the United States, and to make recommendations for their improvement. It is organized to study and report on the conditions of the people of the United States, and to make recommendations for their improvement. It is organized to study and report on the conditions of the people of the United States, and to make recommendations for their improvement. It is organized to study and report on the conditions of the people of the United States, and to make recommendations for their improvement.



# Stimuli for the Devotees' Compassion

WE USUALLY THINK OF GOD SHOWING HIS COMPASSION toward His devotees, but Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism also stresses that in a pure devotional relationship, God's devotees can also feel compassion toward Him (*dayā-rasa*). *The Nectar of Devotion* in particular is full of such examples, although the *Bhāgavatam's* Tenth Canto and the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* also contain examples of *dayā-rasa*. There are five primary *rasas* and seven secondary *rasas*, and *dayā-rasa* is one of the secondary *rasas*.

We most often read of *dayā-rasa* being expressed in the parental mood, although it is a sentiment that is expressed in any of the relationships above *dāsyā*. It is most often seen in the relationships between Kṛṣṇa and His elders because it is in this relationship that Kṛṣṇa most often appears vulnerable. By nature, compassion flows downward from a superior to an inferior, or, if in a peer relationship, when one partner sees the other suffering while the other partner is not. Therefore, *dayā-rasa* is expressed in relationships or exchanges when the devotees see Kṛṣṇa as needing their care.

The stimuli (*uddīpana*) for compassionate love are similar to those things that stimulate a rise in *vātsalya-rati*. One of the prime stimuli for *vātsalya-rasa* is Kṛṣṇa's age. When children are young and therefore dependent, it is natural for their parents to feel a more protective love. Another stimulus is Kṛṣṇa's body. Here are some descriptions from *The Nectar of Devotion*:

The Supreme Personality of Godhead, whose bodily complexion is just like a bluish, new-grown lotus flower, whose body is very delicate and whose lotus eyes are surrounded by scattered hair as black as bees . . .

—NOD, p. 341

When Kṛṣṇa had only three or four teeth coming out of His gums, His thighs were fatty, His body was very, very short, and He began to enhance the parental love of Nanda Mahārāja and Mother Yaśodā with the activities of His childish body.

—NOD, p. 344



Kṛṣṇa also stimulates parental love by His wonderful qualities:

... His blackish bodily hue, ... His all-auspicious bodily features, His mildness, His sweet words, His simplicity, His shyness, His humility, His constant readiness to offer respect to the elderly and His charity. All of these qualities are considered ecstatic provocations for parental love.

—NOD, p. 341

And of course, Kṛṣṇa's childhood pastimes also stimulate parental compassion. Many of His early pastimes put Kṛṣṇa in danger. Pūtanā arrived in Gokula when Kṛṣṇa was a young baby. We can only imagine the pain Mother Yaśodā must have felt to find her child playing on the body of the witch after He had killed her. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with Tṛṇāvarta, Aghāsura, Maṇigrīva and Nalakūvara, Keśī, Vatsāsura, Kāliya, and the others, all evoked an intense and compassionate response on the part of Kṛṣṇa's parents and the other elders in the cowherd community. Activities that reveal Kṛṣṇa's supremacy do not stimulate compassion but interfere with the parental mood, so those in *vātsalya-rasa* tended to give little weight to displays of Kṛṣṇa's opulence, brushing aside the cowherd boys' stories of Kṛṣṇa killing fierce demons as prattle.

Almost all of what we see Nanda and Yaśodā do to safeguard their son is based on the feeling of compassion they have toward Him. They fear always for His well-being, so Yaśodā chants mantras of protection, they give charity to the *brāhmaṇas*, they try to reprimand Him when He is accused by the elderly *gopīs* of stealing butter.

After rising early in the morning, mother Yaśodā first of all offered her breast milk to Kṛṣṇa, and then she began to chant various *mantras* for His protection. . . .

—NOD, p. 343

When mother Yaśodā was thinking that her son was walking in the forest without any umbrella or shoes, she became greatly perturbed to think of how much difficulty Kṛṣṇa must have been feeling.

—NOD, p. 387



## *Kṛṣṇa as the Object of Compassion*

During the Govardhana-līlā, *The Nectar of Devotion* tells us that Mother Yaśodā was experiencing a cross between motherly pride and fear for her son:

When Kṛṣṇa was holding up Govardhana Hill with His left hand, His hair became scattered all over His shoulders, and He appeared to be perspiring. When mother Yaśodā saw this scene, she began to tremble. Then, as she stared at the scene with broadened eyes, she saw Kṛṣṇa begin to exhibit varieties of facial caricatures. Mother Yaśodā then became very happy and began to smile. Then again, when she thought that Kṛṣṇa was holding up the hill for such an extremely long time [compassion], her clothes became soaked with perspiration.

—NOD, p. 387

Nanda too was overwhelmed by feelings of joy as he both saw his son's helplessness and felt able to protect Him:

When Kṛṣṇa was a baby, one day He was walking in the courtyard, capturing the finger of His father, and because He could not walk steadily He appeared to be almost falling down. While Nanda Mahārāja was giving protection to His transcendental son in this way, all of a sudden there were drops of tears in his eyes, and he became overwhelmed with joy.

—NOD, p. 343

Kṛṣṇa became the object of compassion for the whole cowherd community during His pastimes with Kālīya:

When Kṛṣṇa entered the Yamunā River, which had become very poisonous from the presence of Kālīya, mother Yaśodā feared all kinds of mishaps, and she was breathing hotly. Tears from her eyes were soaking her clothes, and she was almost collapsing.

—NOD, p. 373

Because it is Kṛṣṇa's apparent vulnerability that stimulates a devotee's attitude of compassion toward Him, compassion can be felt in any *rasa*. The scriptures say that each *rasa* contains all the moods and characteristics

of the previous *rasas*, plus something more. Compassion is the “something more” in the parental *rasa*, but it is also present in *mādhurya-rasa*:

O dearly beloved! Your lotus feet are so soft that we place them gently on our breasts, fearing that Your feet will be hurt. Our life rests only in You. Our minds, therefore, are filled with anxiety that Your tender feet might be wounded by pebbles as You roam about on the forest path.

—*Bhāg.* 10.31.19, quoted in *Cc. Ādi* 4.173

Ultimately, it is Kṛṣṇa Himself who stimulates compassionate love in His devotees’ hearts, with Himself as the object of affection.



## Vulnerable Kṛṣṇa

WHEN THE DEVOTEES IN VRAJA SEE KṚṢṆA'S OPULENCE, they can no longer feel compassion for Him—He's just too powerful to need them. Therefore, *yogamāyā* usually covers the devotees so that they don't see Kṛṣṇa's supreme power in His pastimes. Almost always, those in the parental *rasa* especially attribute Kṛṣṇa's miraculous doings to some cause other than Himself.

Kṛṣṇa's childhood pastimes tend to be miraculous. Kṛṣṇa is a real hero, and He defends both Himself and His devotees against all attackers. When Kṛṣṇa is a baby, He kills Śakaṭāsura. The older cowherd boys all saw Him do it, and they give a truthful account to their elders. But Nanda and Yaśodā refuse to believe it.

The assembled cowherd men and ladies began to contemplate how this thing had happened. "Is it the work of some demon or evil planet?" they asked. At that time, the small children present asserted that the cart had been kicked apart by the baby Kṛṣṇa. As soon as the crying baby had kicked the cart's wheel, the cart had collapsed. There was no doubt about it. . . . The assembled *gopīs* and *gopas*, unaware that Kṛṣṇa is always unlimited, could not believe that baby Kṛṣṇa had such inconceivable power. They could not believe the statements of the children, and therefore they neglected these statements as being childish talk.

—*Bhāg.* 10.7.9, 10

The *Bhāgavatam* describes Kṛṣṇa's legs as "as soft as leaves." How could the elderly *gopas* and *gopīs* believe baby Kṛṣṇa capable of toppling the cart? Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.7.9:

. . . when the handcart broke, an ordinary child could have been injured in many ways, but because Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, He enjoyed dismantling the cart, and nothing injured Him.

. . . The nearby children saw that actually Kṛṣṇa had kicked the wheel of the cart and this was how the accident happened. By the



arrangement of *yogamāyā*, all the *gopīs* and *gopas* thought that the accident had taken place because of some bad planet or some ghost, but in fact everything was done by Kṛṣṇa and enjoyed by Him.

Similarly, when Mother Yaśodā sees all the universes in Kṛṣṇa's mouth, she is wonderstruck. Then *yogamāyā* covers her awareness of Kṛṣṇa's opulence, and Yaśodā pulls Him onto her lap to suck her breast. And there are other pastimes, such as when Kṛṣṇa pulls down the twin *arjuna* trees, or when He kills Bakāsura. In both instances, the children report what Kṛṣṇa has done accurately, but Kṛṣṇa's elders refuse to believe it. Eventually, Nanda and the cowherd men meet and decide to move. Too many demons have been attacking. It's fortunate that they have all been killed; it must be because they have prayed to Lord Nārāyaṇa. But they never give Kṛṣṇa the credit.

Kṛṣṇa's apparent vulnerability is part of His play with His pure devotees, but when we read Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, we too sometimes feel compassion for Him. When Kṛṣṇa becomes bewildered upon watching the cowherd boys entering Aghāsura's mouth, we see Him as a small boy and we identify with what He is probably feeling. Sometimes devotees wonder whether in our impure state, this is an offense on our parts. Shouldn't we be worshipping Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead? What right do we have to identify with what He might be feeling in His *nara-līlā*?

But we are expected to feel compassion for Kṛṣṇa even in our present stage. We are expected to feel quite a range of emotion on His behalf. Therefore, the sages have presented us with the sagas, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Kṛṣṇa is our hero; we want to honor Him, we want to worship Him, we want to be protected by Him, and at times, we want to save Him from whatever danger appears to threaten Him. This is clear in the behavior of the demigods when they see Kṛṣṇa in one of His *avatāra* forms appear to lose ground while fighting with a demon:

The Lord, who had appeared from the nostril of Brahmā, sprang and aimed His mace at the chin of His enemy, the Hiraṇyākṣa demon, who was stalking fearlessly before Him. Struck by the demon's mace, however, the Lord's mace slipped from His hand and looked splendid as it fell down whirling. This was miraculous, for the mace was blazing



## *Kṛṣṇa as the Object of Compassion*

wonderfully. . . . As the Lord's mace fell to the ground and a cry of alarm arose from the witnessing crowd of gods and *ṛṣi*s, the Personality of Godhead acknowledged the demon's love of righteousness and therefore invoked His Sudarśana discus. . . . As the discus began to revolve in the Lord's hands and the Lord contended at close quarters with the chief of His Vaikuṇṭha attendants . . . there issued from every direction strange expressions uttered by those who were witnessing from airplanes. They had no knowledge of the Lord's reality, and they cried, "May victory attend You! Pray dispatch him. Play no more with him."

—*Bhāg.* 3.19.2–3, 5–6

That we too can tremble when Kṛṣṇa suddenly shows Himself vulnerable is our good fortune. We trust that the Lord can dispatch the demon—we are not yet under the spell of *yogamāyā*—but we get caught up in the emotion of the moment as the demon appears to triumph for some time.

Our interest in the pure devotees' *rasa* and our willingness to feel emotion in Kṛṣṇa consciousness according to our capacity is not sentimentalism. In his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Antya* 14.37, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Unless one is a very highly advanced devotee, he cannot understand these intricate feelings. The author of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, however, has tried to explain this *divyonmāda* as far as possible, and it is our duty simply to appreciate it as far as possible. Therefore the author has made the following request . . . : 'My dear readers, simply try to hear this description with faith and love. That will help you to understand transcendental ecstasy, and at last you will achieve love of Godhead very easily.'"

Kṛṣṇa's pure devotees feel transcendental anxiety not only when Kṛṣṇa appears to be in danger, but even if the sun seems too hot or He might be hungry or fatigued. At such times, the cowherd boys might massage His legs or beg food from the yajñic *brāhmaṇas*. Why shouldn't we too want to relieve Kṛṣṇa's fatigue or hunger? We should learn to feel anxiety for Kṛṣṇa.

What is it that blocks our ability to feel compassion or other such emotions toward Kṛṣṇa? Sometimes it is simply our lack of absorption in it. As Prabhupāda said, the ability to feel compassion is only possible when we



love Kṛṣṇa deeply. Other times it is our sense of His greatness. I realized that one day when I was in Italy. There was a picture in the room where I was staying of Balarāma massaging Kṛṣṇa's feet and legs. At first it struck me as sentimental, because I knew Kṛṣṇa couldn't really be tired. Then I managed to stop that thought and simply appreciate the pastime and the love that inspired it. If in His pastimes and for His own enjoyment, Kṛṣṇa chooses to feel fatigue, and if it leads to the sharing of a nice moment with His devotees, why should I not appreciate His simplicity? If Kṛṣṇa hadn't revealed His vulnerability, where would be the possibility for the depth of exchanges possible only in Vṛndāvana? Kṛṣṇa's so-called vulnerability is just another of His opulences. Everything Kṛṣṇa does is for pleasure. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Of course, no one can control the Supreme Personality of Godhead . . . the Lord . . . feels transcendental pleasure by submitting Himself to the protection of the devotee. This was exemplified by Kṛṣṇa's surrender unto His mother, Yaśodā." (*Kṛṣṇa*, Chapter 9, p. 105)

It could be argued that Kṛṣṇa already possesses everything and therefore has no need for His devotees' compassion. But that compassion is the basis of the service relationship in the Goloka world, and it is an aspect of *prema*. It is that compassion that allows us to think that the Supreme Lord does need us and the services we have to offer, that allows us to feel that He is dependent on us in some way. Our sense of compassion toward Kṛṣṇa gives Him pleasure.

Although I am encouraging devotees to "identify" with Kṛṣṇa's needs in an emotional way, we should not be pretentious. If we pretend to have feelings or realizations that we do not have and which we don't back up with solid spiritual advancement—"When I think of Kṛṣṇa entering Aghāsura's mouth, I feel so terrible I cry"—we are entering a dangerous area. Spiritual life should always be built on honesty. Prabhupāda warned us about those people who speak high *rasa* but who also chase women and smoke *bidis*. We are sentimentalists if our behavior and our talk contradict one another. To actually feel real concern for Kṛṣṇa, we have to be prepared to give up concentration on our own pleasure.

Another dangerous area is to invent pastimes that did not occur or to invent understandings of the pastimes different from what the *ācāryas* have taught. I remember the devotees having *iṣṭa-goṣṭhis* around 1967 in which we would read and discuss about Kṛṣṇa. We all knew the rule: no



## *Kṛṣṇa as the Object of Compassion*

concoction. But one man who was just joining began to speak about Kṛṣṇa from his own imagination. He thought that since the stories were obviously so far-out, someone must be making them up. In that case, he too could make some stories up about Kṛṣṇa. We had to insist that we speak only what Swamiji had taught us.

Ultimately, the compassionate *rasa* is for God-intoxicated persons, those beyond impersonalism and the desire for material sense gratification. Such devotees are beyond feeling their own vulnerability in a mundane sense and can therefore give all their love and attention to Kṛṣṇa's interests. In this book we have spoken about feeling compassion for the poor, the spiritually bereft, for ourselves, and for other devotees, but imagine the state of *kṛṣṇa-prema* in which we feel compassion for the all-opulent person. This relationship with Kṛṣṇa is actually the basis for the whole preaching movement. Understanding Kṛṣṇa's desire to show mercy to the fallen souls, preachers try to alleviate the Lord's concern by distributing the holy name as widely as possible. By serving such a devotee, we too can learn to identify with the Lord's wishes and to strive to alleviate His concerns. That will lead us into the higher realm of those who think of nothing other than ensuring that the Lord experiences only pleasure.

## The Gopīs' Selfless Compassion

THE BASIC ELEMENT, OF COURSE, OF *DAYĀ-RASA*, is the devotee's love for Kṛṣṇa. The deeper the love, the stronger all the components of love will be. *The Nectar of Devotion* states, "In devotional service without strong attraction to the Lord, there may sometimes be smiling and other symptoms, but never the stress or lamentation that are symptoms of devotional service in compassion. The basic principle of this compassion is always ecstatic love. The apprehension of some mishap to Kṛṣṇa or to His beloved queens, as exhibited by Baladeva and Yudhiṣṭhira, has been explained above. This apprehension is due not exactly to their ignorance of the inconceivable potencies of Kṛṣṇa but to their intense love for Him. This kind of apprehension of some mishap to Kṛṣṇa first of all becomes manifested as an object of lamentation, but gradually it develops into such compassionate loving ecstasy that it turns to another channel and gives transcendental pleasure." (NOD, p. 374) This is natural: the more we love a person, the deeper we will care for them when they are suffering or in danger. Love is not a single-layered emotion; rather, it encompasses a range of feelings. Books such as *The Nectar of Devotion*, *Uj्ज्वाला-nīlamanī*, *Vidagdha-mādhava*, and *Lalita-mādhava* describe the shades of love that make up *prema*.

We most often see compassion expressed in the parental *rasa* because Kṛṣṇa's elders always see Him as their dependent. However, the *gopīs* also express compassion toward Kṛṣṇa at different times. They worry when He goes to the forest, for example, that His soft feet will be hurt by the pebbles and thorns on the path. When Kṛṣṇa goes to Mathurā, they worry that He will suffer from their separation and that the women in Mathurā will not know how to serve Him properly:

The women in Mathurā who now associate with Kṛṣṇa cannot know how to serve Him in the way that pleases Him most. When they see He is not satisfied and ask how they can make Him happy, does He tell them about us *gopīs*?



## *Kṛṣṇa as the Object of Compassion*

Kṛṣṇa must tell them, “You city ladies cannot please Me as much as the *gopīs* of Vraja. They are most expert in stringing flower garlands, perfuming their bodies with ointments, playing various rhythms and melodies on stringed instruments, dancing and singing in the *rāsa* performance, displaying their beauty, charm and cleverness, and skillfully playing at questions and answers. They are especially expert in the pastimes of meeting one’s lover and showing jealous anger and other signs of pure love and affection.” Surely Kṛṣṇa must know this. Therefore He’ll probably tell the women of Mathurā, “My dear women of the Yadu clan, please go back to your families. I no longer desire to associate with you. In fact, I’m going back to Vraja early tomorrow morning.”

—*Bhāg.* 10.47.21, purport

In another purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda cites *Vidagdha-mādhava*:

At Akṛūra’s request, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma left the house of Nanda Mahārāja for Mathurā. At that time the mind of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī was disrupted, and She became almost mad because of extreme separation from Kṛṣṇa. She experienced great mental pain and agitation, which caused Her to drown in mental speculation in the river of anxiety. She thought, “Now I am going to die, and when I die, Kṛṣṇa will surely come back to see Me again. But when He hears of My death from the people of Vṛndāvana, He will certainly be very unhappy. Therefore I shall not die.”

—cited in *Cc. Antya* 14.53, purport

Later, when the *gopīs* meet Kṛṣṇa at Kurukṣetra, they do not accept His offer to live in Dvārakā but say only that they wish to bring Him home to Vṛndāvana. Although they tell Kṛṣṇa that it is they who cannot be happy in the opulence of Dvārakā, they wish only to please Him in the place that pleases Him most, Vraja.

In his *Anubhāṣya*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura comments, “The *gopīs* are purely engaged in the service of the Lord without motive. They are not captivated by the opulence of Kṛṣṇa, nor by the understanding that He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” Naturally the *gopīs* were inclined to love Kṛṣṇa, for He was an attractive young boy of Vṛndāvana village. Being village girls, they were not very



much attracted to the field of Kurukṣetra, where Kṛṣṇa was present with elephants, horses and royal dress. Indeed, they did not very much appreciate Kṛṣṇa in that atmosphere. Kṛṣṇa was not attracted by the opulence or personal beauty of the *gopīs* but by their pure devotional service. Similarly, the *gopīs* were attracted to Kṛṣṇa as a cowherd boy, not in sophisticated guise. Lord Kṛṣṇa is inconceivably powerful. To understand Him, great *yogīs* and saintly persons give up all material engagements and meditate upon Him. Similarly, those who are overly attracted to material enjoyment, to enhancement of material opulence, to family maintenance or to liberation from the entanglements of this material world take shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. But such activities and motivations are unknown to the *gopīs*; they are not at all expert in executing such auspicious activities. Already transcendently enlightened, they simply engage their purified senses in the service of the Lord in the remote village of Vṛndāvana. The *gopīs* are not interested in dry speculation, in the arts, in music, or other conditions of material life. They are bereft of all understanding of material enjoyment and renunciation. Their only desire is to see Kṛṣṇa return and enjoy spiritual, transcendental pastimes with them. The *gopīs* want Him simply to stay in Vṛndāvana so that they can render service unto Him, for His pleasure. There is not even a tinge of personal sense gratification.

—Cc. *Madhya* 1.82, purport

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that if Kṛṣṇa were to ask the *gopīs* to go with Him to Dvārakā, they would say that Vraja was their home and that they are too attached to it to live somewhere else. “Only there, the *gopīs* imply, can Kṛṣṇa attract them by wearing peacock feathers in His turban and playing enchanting music with His flute. Only by His appearing again in Vṛndāvana can the *gopīs* be saved, not by any other kind of meditation on Him or theoretical knowledge of the self.” (*Bhāg.* 10.82.48, purport)

The highest expression of the *gopīs*’ compassion for Kṛṣṇa is in their understanding that Kṛṣṇa loves Rādhā the most. All the pastimes in Vṛndāvana revolve around bringing Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa together, with the desire to bring Kṛṣṇa the highest pleasure, and all the *gopīs* in Vṛndāvana, regardless of which camp they serve, want nothing more than this.



# Glossary

## A

**Ācārya**—a spiritual master who teaches by his personal behavior.

**Ahimsā**—nonviolence.

**Ajñāta-sukṛti**—devotional service unknown to the performer.

**Akiñcanā**—without material desires.

**Anartha**—unwanted thing; material desire.

**Aparādha**—offense.

**Arjuna**—one of the five Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa spoke the *Bhagavad-gītā* to him on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra.

**Āśrama**—a spiritual order: *brahmacārī* (celibate student), *grhastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (retired), *sannyāsī* (renunciate); living quarters for those engaged in spiritual practices.

**Aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā**—the pastimes of the Lord, according to the eight divisions of the day.

**Avatāra**—lit., “one who descends”. An incarnation of the Lord.

## B

**Balarāma**—Kṛṣṇa’s elder brother and His first plenary expansion.

**Bhagavad-gītā**—lit., “song of God”. The discourse between Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotee Arjuna, expounding devotional service as both the principal means and the ultimate end of spiritual perfection.

**Bhagavān**—lit., “one who possesses all opulence”. The Supreme Lord, who is the reservoir of all beauty, strength, fame, wealth, knowledge, and renunciation.

**Bhāgavata**—anything related to Bhagavān, especially the Lord’s devotee and the scripture, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

**Bhāgavatam**—see: *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

**Bhājana**—devotional activities; a devotional song.

## Vaiṣṇava Compassion

**Bhajanānandī**—a devotee who is satisfied to cultivate devotional service for himself.

**Bhakta**—a devotee of Kṛṣṇa.

**Bhakta-vatsala**—a description of Kṛṣṇa's quality of loving kindness shown toward His devotees.

**Bhakti**—devotional service to the Supreme Lord.

**Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura**—the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda; an *ācārya* in the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava-*sampradāya*.

**Bhaktivedanta**—a title conferred upon Śrīla Prabhupāda by the Gauḍīya Math, meaning “one who has understood that the conclusion of Vedic scripture is *bhakti* (devotional service).”

**Brahmā**—the first created living being and the secondary creator of the material universe.

**Brahma-bandhu**—one born in a *brāhmaṇa* family but lacking brahminical qualification.

**Brahmacārī**—a celibate student living under the care of a bona fide spiritual master.

**Brahman**—the impersonal aspect of the Absolute Truth; spirit.

**Brāhmaṇa**—one wise in the *Vedas* who can guide society; the first Vedic social order.

**BTG**—*Back to Godhead* magazine, the magazine of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.

## C

**Caitanya (Mahāprabhu)**—lit., “living force”. An incarnation of Kṛṣṇa who appeared in the form of a devotee to teach love of God through the *saṅkīrtana* movement.

**Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Śrī**—the biography and philosophy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, written by Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī.

## D

**Dāsyā-rasa**—the spiritual relationship in which the devotee acts as the Lord's servant.

**Dayā**—mercy.

**Dīna-bandhu**—the master or friend of all living entities.



## Glossary

### G

**Gaudiya Math**—the preaching institution originally established by Śrīla Bhakti-siddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

**Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava**—a follower of Lord Caitanya.

**Gaurakīśora dāsa Bābājī**—the spiritual master of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

**Gokula**—the manifestation of Goloka in the material world.

**Goloka**—Kṛṣṇaloka, the eternal abode of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Gopa**—a cowherd boy; one of Kṛṣṇa's eternal associates.

**Gopī**—a cowherd girl; one of Kṛṣṇa's most confidential servitors.

**Gopī-bhāva**—the mood of the *gopīs*.

**Goṣṭhyānandī**—a devotee who desires to preach the glories of the holy name.

**Gosvāmī**—one who controls his mind and senses; title of one in the renounced order of life. May refer specifically to the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana, who are direct followers of Lord Caitanya in disciplic succession, and who systematically presented His teachings.

**Govardhana Hill**—a hill in Vṛndāvana, the site of many of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

**Gr̥hasṭha**—a married person living according to the Vedic social system.

**Guru-dakṣiṇā**—a gift made to the spiritual master as a token payment for his teachings.

**Gurukula**—a school headed by the spiritual master.

### H

**Harināma**—public chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*.

### I

**ISKCON**—acronym for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

**Iṣṭa-goṣṭhī**—discussions on the teachings of the spiritual master among his disciples.

### J

**Japa**—individual chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra while counting on beads.

**Jīva**—the individual, eternal soul or living entity; part of the Supreme Lord.

**Jñānī**—one who approaches the Supreme by cultivation of knowledge.

K

**Kali**—the personification of quarrel and hypocrisy.

**Kali-yuga**—the present age, which is characterized by quarrel and hypocrisy.

**Kaniṣṭha**—neophyte.

**Karma**—the cycle of action and reaction which binds one to the material universe.

**Karmī**—one engaged in karma (fruitive activity); a materialist.

**Kaupin**—loincloth.

**Kīrtana**—chanting of the Lord's holy names.

**Kṛṣṇa**—the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

**Kṣatriya**—administrative or warrior class; the second Vedic social order.

M

**Mādhurya**—lit., “sweetness”. Refers to the sweet conjugal pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*.

**Madhyama-adhikārī**—a devotee whose advancement in spiritual life is midway between the neophyte (*kaniṣṭha*) and advanced (*uttama*) levels.

**Mahā-bhāgavata**—a devotee in the highest stage of devotional life.

**Mahābhārata**—the history of ancient India, compiled by Śrīla Vyāsadeva and including the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

**Mahā-mantra**—the great chant for deliverance: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.

**Mahā-prasādam**—the remnants of food offered to the Lord, generally understood to be the remnants taken directly from the Lord's plate.

**Mahārāja**—great king. Also used as a title of respect for a *sannyāsi*.

**Maṅgala-ārati**—the first Deity worship of the day, performed an hour and a half before sunrise.

**Māth**—a religious institution.

**Māyā**—the external, illusory energy of the Lord, comprising this material world; forgetfulness of one's relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

**Māyāpur**—a town in West Bengal, India, where Lord Caitanya appeared.

**Mleccha**—a class of persons outside the social and spiritual divisions of Vedic culture, whose standards and practices are considered abominable.



## Glossary

### N

**Nārada Muni**—a great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa who travels throughout the spiritual and material worlds singing the Lord's glories and preaching the path of devotional service.

**Nara-līlā**—the pastimes of the Lord who appears in human form.

**Nārāyaṇa**—the four-handed expansion of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Nectar of Devotion, The**—Śrīla Prabhupāda's summary study of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.

**Nityānanda**—the incarnation of Lord Balarāma who is a principal associate of Lord Caitanya.

### P

**Prabhu**—lit., “master”. Added to a devotee's name by another devotee to show respect.

**Prabhupāda, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami**—Founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON and foremost preacher of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the Western world.

**Prasādam**—lit., “mercy”. Food which is spiritualized by being offered to Kṛṣṇa and which helps purify the living entity; also referred to as *prasāda*.

**Prema**—love of Kṛṣṇa.

**Pūjārī**—a priest, specifically one engaged in temple Deity worship.

### R

**Rādhā(rāṇī)**—the eternal consort and spiritual potency of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Rāgānugā-bhakti**—devotional service following the spontaneous loving service of the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana.

**Rāma**—as part of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, refers to the highest eternal pleasure of Lord Kṛṣṇa; may also refer to Lord Balarāma or Lord Rāmacandra.

**Rāmāyaṇa**—the epic history of Lord Rāmacandra, written by Vālmīki Muni.

**Rasa**—the spiritual essence of a personal relationship with the Supreme Lord.

## S

**Sādhaka**—one who practices regulated devotional service.

**Sādhana**—regulated spiritual activities meant to increase one's attachment to Kṛṣṇa.

**Sādhū**—saintly person.

**Saṅkīrtana**—the congregational chanting of the holy name, fame, and pastimes of the Lord; preaching.

**Sannyāsa**—renounced life; the fourth order of Vedic spiritual life.

**Sannyāsī**—one in the renounced order of life.

**Śāstra**—revealed scripture.

**Siddhi**—a mystic yogic perfection.

**Six Gosvāmīs**—six great disciples of Lord Caitanya who wrote many books on devotional service and who established the major temples in Vṛndāvana.

**Śloka**—a stanza of Sanskrit verse.

**Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam**—the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, which specifically points to the path of devotional love of God.

**Śūdra**—a laborer; one of the four Vedic social orders.

**Śukadeva Gosvāmī**—the sage who originally spoke the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to King Parīkṣit just prior to the king's death.

**Swamiji**—lit., “great master”. A common term of respect addressed to *sannyāsīs*.

## T

**Tattva**—truth.

## U

**Upaniṣads**—108 philosophical treatises that appear within the *Vedas*.

**Uttama-adhikārī**—a topmost devotee.

## V

**Vaidhi-bhakti**—the process of following the regulative principles of devotional service under the guidance of a spiritual master, in accordance with revealed scriptures.



## Glossary

**Vaikunṭha**—the spiritual world.

**Vaiṣṇava**—one who is a devotee of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

**Vaiśya**—the mercantile division of human society.

**Vandanam**—prayer.

**Varṇa**—the four occupational divisions of society: intellectual (*brāhmaṇa*), administrator (*kṣatriya*), merchant (*vaiśya*), and laborer (*śūdra*).

**Varṇāśrama**—the Vedic social system of four social and four spiritual orders.

**Vāsudeva**—the son of Vasudeva, or Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself.

**Vātsalya-rasa**—devotional service to Kṛṣṇa in the mood of parental love.

**Vedas**—the original revealed scriptures.

**VIHE**—Vṛndāvana Institute for Higher Education.

**Vṛndāvana**—Kṛṣṇa's personal abode, where He fully manifests His personal qualities.

**Vyāsadeva**—the original compiler of the *Vedas*, and the author of the *Vedānta-sūtra*, *Mahābhārata*, and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

**Vyāsa-pūjā**—worship of the spiritual master, who represents Śrīla Vyāsadeva, on his appearance day.

## Υ

**Yajña**—sacrifice.

**Yogamāyā**—the internal spiritual potency of the Lord.

**Yoga-nidrā**—the mystic slumber of Lord Viṣṇu.

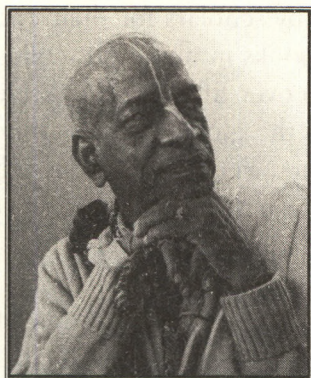
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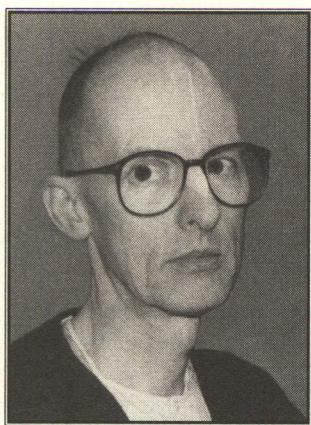
His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda lived in this world from 1896 to 1977. Born in Calcutta, India, he first met his spiritual master, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī, in 1922. At their first meeting he was asked to spread the Vedic knowledge all over the world, and during his many years as a married businessman, he often contemplated this order of his spiritual master. At the age of 63, he accepted the renounced order of life (*sannyāsa*) to help fulfill this mission. From his humble surroundings at the Rādhā-Dāmodara temple in Vṛndāvana, he began work on his life's masterpiece: a multivolume English translation of the eighteen-thousand-verse *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* complete with elaborate commentary.

In 1965, with 40 rupees in his pocket, he came by freighter from India to New York City. After almost a year of great difficulty and heroic perseverance, he established the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. In the twelve short years before he passed away, he had guided the Society and watched it grow to a worldwide society of more than one hundred *āśramas*, schools, temples, institutes, cultural centers, and farm communities.

In Śrīla Prabhupāda's own view, his most significant contribution is his books. Highly respected by scholars for their authority, depth, and clarity, they are used as textbooks in numerous college courses. His writings have been translated into over fifty languages. Despite his advanced age, Śrīla Prabhupāda circled the globe fourteen times on lecture tours that took him to six continents. Yet this vigorous schedule did not slow his prolific literary output. His writings constitute a veritable library of Vedic philosophy, religion, literature, and culture.

For more information about Śrīla Prabhupāda and his work, please visit [www.harekrishna.com](http://www.harekrishna.com), or contact Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, P. O. Box 34074, Los Angeles, CA 90034, Phone: 1-310-837-5283, FAX: 1-310-837-1056.





**S**atsvarūpa dāsa Goswami is a Vaiṣṇava writer, poet, and artist. He was among the first young Americans to assist Śrīla Prabhupāda with his mission in the West and, as one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's intimate disciples, he served as personal secretary for many years. He is also the author of Śrīla Prabhupāda's authorized biography, *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*. While traveling, lecturing on Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and instructing disciples worldwide, he has published many books including poems, memoirs, essays, novels, and studies based on the Vaiṣṇava scriptures. In recent years, his devotional life has evolved to include the creation of numerous paintings, drawings, and sculptures that lovingly capture and express the artist's absorption in the culture of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

# Other books by Satsvarupa dasa Goswami

## Prabhupāda Meditations

*Life with the Perfect Master*  
*Prabhupāda Nectar*  
*Calling Out to Śrīla Prabhupāda/Poems and Prayers*  
*He Lives Forever*  
*Letters from Śrīla Prabhupāda*  
*Prabhupāda Appreciation*  
*Prabhupāda-līlā*

## Living with the Scriptures

*Qualities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa*  
*Saints and Sages of Ancient India*  
*Cc. Āśraya*  
*Living with the Scriptures*  
*Niti-śāstra: Sayings of Cāṇakya and Hitopadeśa*  
*Spiritualized Dictionary*  
*A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam*

## Devotional Practices

*Entering the Life of Prayer*  
*Japa Reform Notebook*  
*Vaiṣṇava Behavior/ The Twenty-six Qualities of a Devotee*

## New Writings

*Every Day, Just Write*  
*When the Saints Come Marching In*  
*Sanatorium*  
*Under Dark Stars*



